BUSINESS /B1
P114B needed to shield RP from recession

SPORTS / A13
Bolt edges out Phelps for int'l sports media's athlete of the year title

SATURDAY SPECIAL / D1
Josh Hartnett's film set in Mindanao much-awaited movie

METRO / A15
NCRPO sacks 74 cops; 57 others suspended

Green ringtones howl, hoot, trill, screech...

REMEMBER WHEN cell phone ringtones mostly advertised personal musical tastes (Beyonce, Metallica, "The 1812 Overture") or parental pride (babies cooing)? The chance to

GREEN An

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Saturday, January 3, 2009 ★ 5 sections / Vol. 24 / No. 36 P10 ... www.inquirer.net

CHR wants writ of amparo for squatters

By Nikko Dizon

THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN Rights (CHR) is seeking to expand the rules of the writ of amparo to include within its protection squatters who are being forcibly evicted and to uphold squatters' right to adequate housing.

The request was made to the Supreme Court (SC) in a CHR resolution which also recommended that the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) impose a moratorium

CHR WANTS A4

'PDEA making big issue of small boys,' says lawyer

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE LAWYER OF TWO OF THE so-called 'Alabang Boys' yesterday described as "ridiculous" the alleged bribe to have the suspects released, saying that the families of the young men could not afford more than P50 million.

"The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency is making a big issue out of small boys," Jacqueline Veneza said yesterday.

Veneza is the counsel of Richard Santos Brodett and Joseph Ramirez Tecson—who were arrested, along with Jorge Jordan Joseph, on Sept. 20 four hours apart in Araneta Center in Quezon City and in Ayala Alabang, Muntinlupa.

Brodett, whose declared address is on Acacia Avenue, Ayala Alabang Village, according to the PDEA spot report, was arrested inside the posh subdivision after Joseph, a resident of Pacific Village, also in Muntinlupa, got in touch with him.

"Joseph [Jorge Jordan] was my contact for the ecstasy. But he also contacted Brodett at that time," said PDEA intelligence officer Jigger Jandiel, who posed as a buyer. Tecson was arrested in a follow-up operation.

Veneza denied that the Tecson family had any connection to Maj. Ferdinand Marcelino, head of the agency's Special Enforcement Service that led the buy-bust operation, and that it offered him a bribe.

PDEA A4

RICHARD BRODETT

JORGE JORDAN JOSEPH

JOSEPH TECSON

Back to Cha-cha in House

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT Post-New Year's-day activities in Quiapo on Friday include an earnest bargain hunting for lucky charms and amulets and for these candles in seven good luck colors, each of which means something. Of course, to devotees, there's always the Quiapo Church's Black Nazarene to pray to—especially on His feast on Jan. 9—for more blessings throughout the new year. JOAN BONDOC

Nograles: Committee report out this month

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A NEW YEAR, A FRESH push for Charter change.

Allies of President Macapagal-Arroyo will restart this month the debate on Charter change (Cha-cha) in the House of Representatives, with the committee on constitutional amendments expected to submit its choice of the mode—whether constituent assembly or constitutional convention.

Members of the House will return to work on Jan. 19 after a one-month break. The final voting on the mode of changing the Constitution is set to take place next month.

"The committee report will come out in January and will hopefully be ready for plenary debates by February," Speaker Prospero Nograles said in a text message to the Inquirer.

"As far as the House is concerned, Cha-cha will go the route of ordinary legislation," he said.

Before the House members went on their break and agreed on a ceasefire on Cha-cha debates during the holidays, the committee on constitutional amendments was poised to tackle the preferred mode to change the constitutional provisions on foreign investments as proposed by Nograles.

The House, however, was sharply divided on the Cha-cha. Mr Arroyo's allies led by Rep. Luis Villafuerte, president of her party, the Kabalikat ng

BACK A4

'08 over but Mariel's 100 'kwitis' still unlit

By Jocelyn R. Uy

WHEN MARIEL CAMBAYO learned that communist guerrillas were finally releasing her husband—a junior Army officer—on New Year's Day, she immediately bought a hundred baby rockets to welcome him back to freedom.

The New Year has come but Mariel's special rockets have yet to glow in the sky.

The New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas holding Lt. Vicente Cambayo since capturing him on Nov. 7 in the Compostela Valley have again changed their minds about when he will be released, Mariel said.

"I just wish they would tell me if they are still going to release my husband or not because the agony of waiting and hoping and ending up with nothing is too much to bear," a weeping Mariel told the Inquirer by phone from Tagaganno City the other day.

The NPA on Wednesday pledged anew to release Cambayo on the first week of this month. Rigoberto Sanchez, spokesperson of the NPA's Mer-

'08 OVER A4

TALE OF 2 FAMILIES

Pangandamans ask bloggers to stop attacks

By TJ Burgonio

ADMITTING THAT HE IS hurting, Agusan Rafaela Secretary Nasser Pangandaman is appealing to the public, specifically the bloggers, to stop vilifying his family.

"We're being condemned left and right. It's very painful for us. We're very much affected by this," he said in a phone interview yesterday from a beach in Subic, Zambales, where he said his family had fled off for a "much-needed break."

Pangandaman said he hoped the public would stop the criticisms and let the law run its course on the case arising from the Dec. 26 raid house Israel between his sons and the family of businessman Delfin Dela Paz at the Valley Golf and Country Club in Antipolo City.

"They should be sensitive

PANGANDAMANS A7

No golf talk in Dela Paz New Year's Eve dinner

By DJ Yap

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, THE family of businessman Delfin Dela Paz invited close friends over for a small dinner party. One topic of conversation was forbidden.

"We just decided that for this one night, we won't even think about what happened," Dela Paz's 18-year-old daughter Bambee said, referring to the raid house Israel at the Valley Golf and Country Club that thrust them into the public eye.

For days, the incident had been almost the only subject discussed in the Dela Paz household. "Something like this, it was all we talked about," she

NO GOLF A7

Israeli 1-ton bomb kills Hamas leader

"BUTCHER OF CHILDREN," reads one placard in the rally of Filipino Muslims at the Blue Mosque on Friday, in Taguig City to protest the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, which has killed at least 400 Palestinians including children. The rally organizer, Nelbana Maleralo, accuses Israel of genocide.

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP—AN ISRAELI warplane dropped a one-ton bomb on the home of a top Hamas leader Thursday, instantly killing him and 18 others, and the Israeli army said troops massed on the Gaza border were ready for any strikes to invade.

The attacks continued Friday. Before dawn, Israeli aircraft hit 15 houses belonging to Hamas militants, Palestinians said. They said the Israelis either warned nearby residents by phone or fired a warning missile to reduce civilian casualties. Twelve people were hurt in the attacks, hospital officials said.

The attack that killed Hamas strongman Nizar Rayan and most of his family was the first of several strikes on homes of Hamas figures to kill a leader from the group's top echelon since Israel's air campaign began on Saturday.

The hit on Rayan's home obliterated the four-story apartment building and pooled off the walls of others around it, carving out a vast field of rubble in the

ISRAELI A6

WEATHER FORECAST

FRIDAY: Cloudy with rains

Baguio	Cloudy with rains	Kalibo	Cloudy with rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with rains	Cebu	Cloudy with rains
Laoag	Cloudy with rains	Tacloban	Clear
Metro Manila	Cloudy with rains	San Jose	Cloudy with rains
Virgonia	Cloudy with rains	Zamboanga	Cloudy with rains
Legaspi	Cloudy with rains	Cagayan de Oro	Rain
Coron	Cloudy with rains	Davao	Cloudy with rains

Second FRONTPAGE

6X42 (last draw Dec. 31): 15 23 4 26

SUERTRES (last draw Dec. 31): 9 9 9

4D (last draw Dec. 31): 1 4 4

FOUR DIGIT (last draw Dec. 31): 5 3 9 7

2 2 8

MEGALOTTO 6/45 (last draw Dec. 31): 7 10 12 36 43 45

P8,053,862.40

Canadian chef's death still a puzzler

By Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Northern Luzon and Jocosa Aning in Manila

ANGELES CITY—THE CANADIAN EMBASSY yesterday obtained the reports of investigators who are trying to determine if Canadian chef Elisa Lojo Gutierrez had committed suicide or was murdered last month in one of the plush resorts in nearby Clark Freeport.

Chief Inspector Rene Aspe, commander of the police's Station 4 outside Clark, turned over documents on the case to a Canadian Embassy representative at the request of Consul Shaun Hughes.

Hughes did not say in his letter if the Canadian Embassy had proposed the transfer of the investigators to other law agencies.

The Canadian and Mexican foreign ministries were supposed to have instructed their countries' ambassadors in the Philippines to follow up the case and possibly refer it to the National Bureau of Investigation.

Aspe said there was no conclusive proof yet if Gutierrez had committed suicide or somebody had also been involved.

Born in Mexico, Gutierrez would have turned 26 on Jan. 8. She had a culinary management diploma from the Confederation College in Ontario.

A local maid, Ed Erwin Perez, a waiter, and driver Marvin Ritz is one of the rooms at the resort where they found her body.

Ritz said he used a laminated ID to open the locked room. They found her body "hanging on the metal brace of the ceiling with a [telephone] cable."

The medico-legal officer, Chief Insp. Reynaldo Dave Jr., concluded that she died of "asphyxia by hanging." He said he found two stab wounds in Gutierrez's neck, two more on the chest and abdomen and four incised wounds on the wrists.

Angelito Cunlas, Fontana senior human resource manager, said Gutierrez came to see her in early November to say "she was not happy and was very eager to go back to her country."

On Dec. 14, 4 p.m. Sarah Andrychuck, also a chef, reported to the security department that Gutierrez had been missing since Dec. 22.

Andrychuck said that on or about the third week of December, Gutierrez did not eat or sleep for almost a week and "seemed worried and stressed." Four of her staff members gave the same observation, their affidavits showed.

The Canadian media reported on Dubai's Chief Executive magazine's Dan Stonerfield, said he could not believe she took her own life.

FAMILY DAY

Families spend precious time bonding at Quezon Memorial Circle in Quezon City, some even pitching tents in one of the few parks in the Metro. AKIO JAMES

BIR, AMLC should act on Feshan case now, says Gordon

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE COMPANY THAT SUPPLIED the overpriced fertilizers in the controversial P728-million fertilizer fund scam should be facing prosecution "by now, said Sen. Richard Gordon.

The senator, who heads the blue ribbon committee investigating the scandal, said officials of Feshan Phil. had already "virtually owned up to evading taxes and money laundering."

The Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Anti-Money Laundering Council "should already be taking the necessary actions after possible liabilities of Feshan executives were revealed to the Senate probe," he said.

During the Dec. 21, 2008 hearing, Feshan president Aida Cargullo admitted she had allowed Feshan to store about P105 million from its accounting books "for safekeeping" and to prominently P66 million worth of fertilizers to the government.

Feshan is the biggest supplier for the P728-million fertilizer fund project, most of whose funding allegedly went to the election campaign of President Macapagal-Arroyo in 2004.

Gregorio Ilac revealed that Marlon Aplasca, the alleged "packager" of the project proposal, had advised her to apply for a tax amnesty so Feshan would not pay any tax on its income it did not earn but was reported in the books.

"Tax amnesty was used to cover up the fruits of the crime. The BIR should now look into these because that's evidence," he said.

"Feshan had to show that they were paid P105 million. They availed of the tax amnesty so they would not be liable for taxes anymore. And yet they paid only P500,000 which is not even 1.0 percent or 5 percent of the amount. That is illegal," said the senator.

Even with the tax amnesty, the P500,000 was "far too low." He said the total tax due was P525.3 million.

Antismokers want tighter watch on cigarette sales near schools

By Tina G. Santos

ANTISMOKING advocates have urged local governments to strictly implement the Tobacco Regulation act of 2003 prohibiting the sale of cigarettes near schools.

Lawyer Mrs. Pat Lizon, a member of the antismoking group Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance Philippines (FCAP), called the attention of the City of Manila's permits division, saying several establishments in the city continue to disregard the law.

"We want all local governments units to comply, but right now we're focusing on Manila because it's very strategic, given its dense population," Lizon said.

Convenience stores as well as sometimes some drugstores of educational institutions continue to sell cigarettes to students," the complainant.

Lizon cited Republic act No. 9211, which states that the sale or distribution of tobacco products is prohibited within 300 meters from any point of the perimeter of a school or public playground.

PHILHEALTH CIRCULAR
No. 01, series of 2009

TO : ALL INDIVIDUALLY PAYING MEMBERS, ALL ACCREDITED COLLECTING BANKS AND AGENTS, PHILHEALTH REGIONAL OFFICES AND ALL OTHERS CONCERNED

SUBJECT : Extended Deadline for Premium Payment

In view of the recent long holidays, the deadline for payment of premiums of all Individually Paying Members (IPMs) for 4th Quarter 2008 is extended until Friday, January 16, 2009.

This extension is being made to enable our members to keep their premium remittances updated and to ensure hassle-free availment of benefits if needed.

Payments may be made at any of PhilHealth's accredited collecting banks, agents and their branches nationwide, as well as through PhilHealth's Regional Offices strategically located in key cities all over the country.

This circular takes effect immediately.

[Sgd.] DR. REY D. AQUINO
President and CEO

Date: January 2, 2009

TXT iNGO WINNING NUMBERS FOR JANUARY 2, 2009 34 36 33 68 11 JACKPOT: P10,087,921.99

Phonebook
Information
Imagination now lives in Global City, Taguig
Samsung Electronics Philippines, Corporation is now at 11/F University Parkway, North Bonifacio, Global City, Taguig
Contact Number: +63 (2) 2147777
SAMSUNG
SAMSUNG

Back to Cha-cha in House when it returns to work Jan. 19

From page A1

Mabuhay Pilipino (Barapil), were pushing for a Con-ass (which they interpreted as getting the majority vote of Congress with the House and Senate voting as one rather than separate votes) before 2010.

Unconstitutional

The issue of whether Congress could convene as one body to vote on Charter change is expected to be elevated to the Supreme Court after the Senate passed a resolution last month rejecting the House position.

The resolution, signed by all 23 senators, said any attempt by the House "to unilaterally propose amendments to, or revision of, the Constitution without the approval by three-fourths of the Senate voting separately is unconstitutional."

Lawmakers against term extension through Cha-cha were pushing for a constitutional convention (Con-con) whose delegates would be elected in the May 2010 polls.

Nograles said he was open to either a Con-ass or a Con-con as long as it would result in the economic provisions getting amended.

Villafuerte belittled Nograles' claim, saying that he drafted the Con-ass bill specifically to move Nograles' intention to amend the economic provisions.

Signature campaign

The Ramjal bond issued that the Speaker was the first to affix his signature to the petition inviting to convene as Con-ass. The move is reportedly spearheaded by the President's oldest son, Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo.

In a privilege speech, Villafuerte said he expected the majority of House members to make up their mind on the Cha-cha mode after the holiday break. He expressed hope that Nograles would set the example by coming out with his personal stand.

A number of House members wished that the President would dwell less on changing the Constitution and focus more on stabilizing the economy during the hard times and on building a legacy before her term ends in 2010.

"I wish that the President will order her allies to stop all moves for Charter change, especially those calling for a consolidated assembly and initiating a signature campaign, so that she can remove all distractions and focus all her

NOGRALES: Cha-cha will get the votes of ordinary legislators. INQUIRER PHOTO

time and effort on the economy," said Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez in a text message to the Inquirer.

Abandon Cha-cha

Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño said he wished that the President would "completely abandon" Cha-cha in 2009 amid the myriad of problems facing the economy.

"Given her track record, especially her adherence to neo-liberal liberalization that is at the bottom of the global economic crisis and the flash war on terrorism, it's wishful thinking to hope President Arroyo will change policies now. No threat is sweet for change," Casiño said.

Dinchiyan Rep. Rodolfo Golez said the President should clearly distance herself from Cha-cha. "The last 18 months of the Presidency should be devoted more to the transition from 2010. She should distance herself from partisan politics and resume an apolitical bureaucracy whereupon Philippine politics will continue to be dysfunctional," he said.

Necessary

Although the old non say whether the President should step into Cha-cha campaign, Quezon City Rep. Marisa Dellatorre said Ms Arroyo should "step out of politics" and "do away with political debts."

But Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez said the President must not stop Cha-cha because a number of congressmen believed that this was necessary to pursue the economy.

"Our goal is to change the period between elections from three to six years. We cannot afford to continue this system because our fiscal position is under threat every election year—our revenues and customs duties are down in the first six months of every election year," Suarez said.

He said the opposition to Cha-cha was largely based on the suspicion that the President and her allies wanted to extend their term of office, which he claimed was pure speculation.

Broad spectrum

Opposition to Cha-cha though Con-ass has the support of a broad spectrum of society including Catholic Church officials, El Shaddai leader Bro. Mike Velarde and big business.

On Dec. 12, thousands gathered on Ayala Avenue in Makati to denounce Con-ass after word about the members of the House loyal to Ms Arroyo to amend or revise the Constitution without the consent of the Senate.

Despite the protest, Malacañang is not stopping the President's allies in the House from pursuing the Cha-cha campaign.

House starts 'Alabang Boys' probe on Monday

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES will start on Monday its investigation of the government's war on illegal drugs and its drug enforcement and prosecution to determine why major operations like those involving the so-called "Alabang Boys" turned out to be legal busts on the hands of the justice department.

Last week, Sen. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, chair of the Senate committee on public order, salary and illegal drugs, had agreed to look into the case of the "Alabang Boys," especially on how to ensure that the enforcement side and prosecution side work on the same page. This was according to Senator "Tito" Sotto III, chair of the Dangerous Drugs Board.

To go full blast

Reps. Sherie Ann Bay Rosario Abilan, chair of the congressional oversight committee on dangerous drugs, has invited Philippine Drug Enforcement Authority (PDEA) head Dionisio Santiago, Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño, and Justice for an informal hearing on Jan. 5.

"This is just information gathering from the key players. We plan to go full blast once Congress resumes in session. We have decided to do this quickly because this matter will," Abilan said.

Abilan was referring to the alleged P50-million bribe that led to the recommendation by some prosecutors to dismiss the charges against Richard Gomez Brodett, Jorge Joaquin Joseph and Joseph Basanes Tesoro.

He noted the dismissal of cases involving high-profile drug operations made by the PDEA last year.

"We cannot let this continue. We have to find out the reasons why these cases where the culprits have been caught red-handed are being dismissed so easily," said Abilan in a phone interview with the Inquirer.

Discouraging pattern of dismissals

The PDEA caught the "Alabang Boys" peddling Ecstasy pills in sting operation last September but this was dismissed by the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigating panel led by Zuño after three months for insufficiency of evidence.

The dismissal has led to charges of bribery by the PDEA which has prompted President Macapagal-Arroyo to order that the "Alabang Boys" remain in jail while the case now being re-investigated.

Abilan said the case of the "Alabang Boys" was not the only concern of the House committee.

He noted that there seemed to be a discouraging pattern in which the DOJ had failed to make any of the charges stick on suspects linked to illegal drug trade busted by the PDEA in 2008 such as those in La Union, Laguna, Nueva Ecija, and Subic Freeport. —GIL C. Cabacungan Jr.

'PDEA making big issue of small boys,' says lawyer

From page A1

Mercado-Arroyo claimed that he was offered a bribe thrice, first P3 million and later one or P20 million, in exchange for the release of the suspects. He said the first and third offers came from unknown damsels, for the release of Tesoro whose family is engaged in the construction and restaurant business.

The head of PDEA's Special Investment Section said the second offer was relayed to him by a relative (classmate) at the Philippine Military Academy.

The PDEA also said it received information that P50 million was given to state prosecutors that resulted in their recommendation to dismiss the case against Brodett, Joseph and Tesoro.

Gold Rolex

Since Chief Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño has denied that he and the prosecutors who investigated and reviewed the case had been bribed into recommending the dismissal of the charges.

"The stories about a bribe and the exorbitant amount of P50 million plus a gold Rolex watch and another P10 million are fabricated and baseless," Arroyo said.

She continued: "To say that there was a bribe it is traumatic that not one is a being one and that not clothes but on neck. But if anyone took the time to read the case file and the resolution, they would see that not case is very strong and is not in vain."

iPods, cellphones seized

Turning the tables on the PDEA, the lawyer questioned its refusal to return to the young men from seats as a laptop, several mobile phones, Apple iPods, stallion with crystals and GPS cards, and an expensive watch that were confiscated from them during the operation.

Those items have nothing to do with the case, Arroyo said.

The PDEA said the suspects were carrying 66 tablets of Ecstasy, sachets of cocaine and packets of marijuana when arrested.

Arroyo said that whatever the PDEA claimed it has been found in the possession of the suspects could not be admitted in court as evidence because they were illegally obtained.

Shoot to kill

Ambuscaders agents said "warrantless search" when the cars were searched, she said. "Why are you not more on these boys?" she asked.

The defense has physical evidence that the supposed buy-bust operation was really a "shoot-to-kill operation," she said, echoing the remark earlier made by Joseph's father, Johnny Midnight.

One of her client's car was shot at least 10 times, three of which were aimed at the windshield by the driver's side, Arroyo pointed out.

A report made by the Ayala Alabang subdivision's security team showed that the PDEA had failed to coordinate and get clearance from it when the alleged shoot-out occurred.

The report also said that the PDEA did not coordinate with the Southern Police District to stop other police officers arrested by law.

Stray bullet hit guard

The private security agency whose members witnessed the operation, added that stray bullets hit several cars and a security guard.

The report then disclosed that the guards heard one of the antiterrorism agents say that if it happened outside the gate subdivision, the three men would not be alive.

"After we presented the report summarization, the PDEA even approached the security agency and the governors of the Ayala Alabang Village requesting them to retract [the report]," Arroyo said.

The suspects remain in the PDEA detention cell in Quezon City as any resolution for their release must be reviewed by the justice secretary.

SO SORRY The photo of Johnny "Midnight" Joseph, which appeared in the Inquirer on Jan. 2 was taken by Inquirer reporter contributor Arlyn dela Cruz. It was inadvertently credited to Miko Morales. Our apologies to Arlyn.

CHR wants writ of amparo for squatters

From page A1

on the forced eviction of squatters in Metro Manila.

CHR Chair Lilia de Lima said neither the Supreme Court nor the MMDA has responded to the resolution which the CHR en banc issued last Nov. 4.

In seeking to expand the protection afforded by the writ of amparo, the CHR said the tribunals' new judicial remedy should include the protection of people's economic, social and cultural rights.

"Social justice and human rights dictate that urban or rural poor dwellers shall not be evicted or their dwellings demolished, except in accordance with law and in a just and humane manner, and that no resettlement of urban or rural dwellers shall be undertaken without adequate consultation with them and the communities where they are to be relocated," it said in the resolution.

The petition for a writ of amparo is a remedy available to any person whose right to life, liberty and security is violated or threatened with violation by an unlawful act or omission of a public official or employee, or of a private individual or entity.

The writ of amparo—from the Spanish verb to protect, meaning to protect—was approved by the Supreme Court in September 2007 to prevent victims of and those threatened by extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

The writ, which is an order issued by the court, can be applied for by anyone. It compels state agencies to look for the missing or the disappeared, failing which the official could be held liable by the court.

FERNANDO

DE LIMA

Covenant

The CHR argued that the Philippines was a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Covenant) which "recognizes the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate housing."

It said that the forced evictions of squatters was incompatible with the Covenant as it may result in "violations of civil and political rights, such as the right to life, the right to security of the person, the right to non-interference with privacy, family and home, and the right to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions."

Urban poor groups had submitted a resolution to the CHR denouncing what they said were the "regime and inhumane manner" in which the evictees was being carried out by the MMDA and the local government units.

The members also called for a moratorium on these forced evictions.

The CHR resolution stressed that the evictees should be done in accordance with the provisions of the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA).

It said the MMDA has evicted illegal dwellers and demolished the dwellers then have put up in public places over-crowded camps and worsening "unhygienic conditions" and the mandatory requirements of the UDHA ... on the theory that such structures are nuisances per se."

The CHR also recommended that the government invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing to the country.

736,980 squatter families

In 2009, the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) presented a report about the number of "informal settlers" in the country at the Asian Forum conference. Citing October 1999 figures, the HUDCC said that Metro Manila had 736,098 informal settler families, corresponding to more than half (50.1 percent) of total informal families in the country.

This was followed by Southern Luzon and Bicol Region (201,336 families, or 13.6 percent), Visayas (180,852 families, or 12.3 percent), Mindanao (153,580 families, or 10.5 percent), and Central Luzon (145,017 families, or 10.7 percent).

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, January 3, 2009
Before Epiphany
Most Holy Name of Jesus

1st Reading: 1 Jn 2:29-3:6
Gospel: Jn 1:29-34

When John saw Jesus coming towards him, he said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. A bit of wisdom I said: A man cannot love our sins & eternally salvation too, for he can be sure. I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing to prepare for him, so that he might be revealed to Israel."

And John also gave this testimony, "I saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove from heaven and resting on him. I myself did not know him but God who sent me to baptize told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' Yes, I have seen and I declare that this is the Chosen One of God."

Commentary

Did you see an extremely high value on the [or not] of knowledge, especially spiritual knowledge. He gave to the knowledge of God through [our] personal encounters or even into our daily walk until then, along with learning from other Christians, especially those who are gifted the ability to teach us about our spiritual life. When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he realized at once that Jesus was the one for whom he, John, had been anything so hard to prepare the people of Israel. "He, I have seen and I declare that this is the Chosen One of God!"

What precious words of us from receiving knowledge directly from God is that we have never been taught to listen. We have to be willing to learn to tune [ear] of making ready with God to hear Him. Oftentimes, we don't see good of God or [or] [or] [or] other or timidity. But sometimes and especially we all see that the Lord and Master we have received are not just there to be told stories, facts about earthly joy and misfortunes. So, as [particularly as] we, be we proclaim our knowledge and love of God to others must.

Dominican Communications Foundation, Inc., 4 Misericordia St., Off Aurora Blvd., Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines, Tel. 911-5181 to 84, Fax 911-5185, Email: [illegible] Web site: http://www.dominicanfriars.com/ (Circular Publication) A Non-Stock, Non-Profit Corporation Registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Reg. No. 1997 Aurora Blvd., Cubao Quezon City Postal: [illegible]

No need for plebiscite in Cagayan de Oro—SC

By Norman Bordadora

THE SUPREME COURT (SC) UPheld an act creating the second district of Cagayan De Oro, dismissing arguments by a private lawyer that the holding of a plebiscite was required for the creation of a new legislative district.

The high tribunal ruled that the **legislative reapportionment** of a city does not involve the alteration of the boundaries of a local government unit, "the court said in a **decision penned by Justice Arturo** Brion.

"In contrast, no plebiscite requirement exists under the apportionment or reapportionment provision," it added.

The court said the "legislative district" that the Constitution speaks of may be called a political unit because it is the basis for the election of a member of the House of Representatives and members of the local legislative body.

No effect

However, the court said such a reapportionment would not affect local governance.

"Unlike a province, which has a governor; a city or a municipality which has a mayor; and a barangay, which has a punong barangay, a district does not have its own elected executive," the court said.

"The role of the congressman that it elects is to ensure that the voice of the people of the district is heard in Congress, not to oversee the affairs of the legislative district. Not being a corporate unit sine qua nonhas it has no legal personality that must be entered or dissolved and has no capacity to sue," it added.

"Hence, there is no need for any plebiscite in the creation, dissolution or any other similar action on a legislative district," it said.

The court, on the other hand, said local government units are corporate units through which the people act in their corporate capacity as local concerns.

Thus, the Constitution saw it fit to expressly secure the consent of the people in the creation, division, merger, abolition or alteration of boundaries of local government units, the court said.

LUCKY CHARMS Outside the Quiapo church in Manila, today charms enjoy brisk sales. Best sellers are figurines of the rat, this year's Chinese astrological sign, and candles with the so-called seven lucky colors. Top treasure, however, is still the image of the Black Nazarene, which draws thousands of devotees every first Friday of the year. JOAN BONDOC

Bulacan dad a suspect in youth's slay

By Marlon Ramos

PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE chief Jesus Verzosa has ordered the speedy resolution of a shooting incident in San Jose Del Monte City, Bulacan province on Thursday that left one person dead and two others wounded.

Governor Leopoldo Bunsol, chief of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO), said Verzosa directed them to arrest the suspect, Jimmy Sola, a councilor of Barangay Gaya-gaya, San Jose Del Monte City.

Sola is suspected of shooting three men as a retaliation allegedly from Francisco Holmes 2, a private subdivision, around 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

One of the men, Sid Ervin Cacli, 23, died instantly from bullet wounds in different parts of his body.

Survivors

His companions, Ariel Batara and Victor Corpuz, narrowly survived the attack and were brought to a hospital in Quezon City.

Corpuz later identified Sola as the man who shot them. Teodoro Cueto, the slain man's father, said his son was the lone witness in another killing case involving allegedly involving the suspect.

Ultimatum

Bunsol sought the help of the Caloocan City police because Sola was reported to be hiding in the area.

"We gave an ultimatum to our policemen to arrest the suspect within 24 hours," Bunsol told reporters in a phone interview. (With a report by Carmela Reyes, Inquirer Central Luzon)

GenSan on alert after attacks

GENERAL SANTOS—PHILIPPINE SECURity forces were ordered yesterday to stay on high alert after threats of more bomb attacks in the country's volatile south, police said.

A hour bus's fire grenade attack at a park in General Santos City in Cotabato province wounded 22 people, just a day after another incident at a police outpost left three injured.

More cops

Extra personnel were deployed in the city, particularly in parks and other popular public areas, said regional police commander Fidel Carrera.

"We are on heightened alert because of some reports have received that there would still be some bombings to be conducted in Mindanao," he said.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but intelligence officials say they suspect the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Peace talks suspended

Peace talks between the government and the MILF were suspended in August, when the rebels launched a spate of attacks across Mindanao that left scores dead and hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced.

On Tuesday, a suspected Muslim militant was killed when an improvised explosive device he was carrying exploded in Zamboanga City. AFP

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New peace brokers

By TJ Burgonio

NORWAY, COUNTRIES, INCLUding Qatar, have offered to broker new peace negotiations between the government and the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Agriculture Secretary Nasser Pangandaman said yesterday.

He, however, confirmed that Qatar, which brokered the settlement of the Lebanese conflict with Muslim separatists, was one of those countries.

"Qatar is looking at how they can help us. They've brokered talks with Lebanon. There are intimations they want to be part of the ongoing peace process," he said on the phone.

President Macapagal-Arroyo made a three-day official visit to Qatar in mid-December to enlist its support for the resumption of talks with the MILF.

Malaysian-brokered peace talks between the government and the MILF collapsed in August after the Arroyo administration backed out of a deal that would expand an autonomous Muslim territory in Mindanao. The Supreme Court ruled that the agreement was unconstitutional.

The collapse of the agreement led to renewed hostilities in Mindanao which has displaced hundreds of thousands of residents.

International agencies have warned of a humanitarian crisis and suspended refunds the Philippine government and the MILF to go back to the negotiating table.

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Rock band guitarist held in Dubai over drugs

DUBAI—ROCK GUITARIST GEO Seppelin Tayag of the Kamikazee band, due to give a concert in this city, began his New Year in detention accused of drug possession, The National newspaper reported yesterday.

According to the United Arab Emirates newspaper, Tayag was arrested on Dec. 4 shortly after his arrival in Dubai and is being held at an airport detention center.

The guitarist has not been formally charged. The report said the prosecutor was awaiting results of urine tests.

The newspaper said Tayag was found with 0.07 grams of marijuana in his possession which he insisted he had not intended to bring with him or to use in Dubai.

Dubai, one of the seven members of the UAE federation, is a major tourist center but has strict laws on drugs. Drug possession can mean at least four years in prison while trafficking can result in the death penalty. AFP

Israeli 1-ton bomb kills key Hamas leader

From page A1

crowded Jabaliya town in north Gaza. The accounts of debris were so removing that they swallowed up cars.

Eighteen other people, including all four of Nizar's wives and nine of his 12 children, also died, Palestinian health officials said. The Muslim faith allows men to have up to four wives.

One man cradled the burned, limp body of a young child he pulled from the rubble.

The 48-year-old Rayan ranked among Hamas' top five decision-makers. A professor of Islamic law, he was known for his close ties to the group's military wing and was respected in Gaza for dressing combat injuries and personally participating in clashes against Israeli forces. He sent one of his sons to a suicide bombing that killed two Israeli civilians in 2002.

DIRECT HIT Palestinians around the home of Hamas leader Nizar Rayan can be their lives as a bomb-carrying strike destroy killed deadly blow against the top ranks of the Islamic group in Gaza. AP/AFP

Diplomatic opening

There as it weakened its offensive, Israel maintained an opening for the intense diplomatic efforts by leaders in the Middle East and Europe trying to bring about a truce. Israel said it would consider a halt to the fighting if international monitors were brought in to track compliance with any truce with Hamas.

Adding to the urgency of those stumbling for a ceasefire, Israel's military said its preparations for a possible ground assault are now complete and troops are ready to storm the border if its air operation to stamp out Hamas rocket fire needs to be expanded.

Goldfarb roamed along the Gaza border said they were eager to join the fight and were even cheered as they heard thunderous air strikes in the distance.

20 targets

Rayan's home was one of five hit by the military Thursday, among more than 20 targets altogether. Warplanes shredded the houses, taking off walls and roofs and leaving behind very dollhouse-like views into rooms that still contained furniture.

Israel's military says the homes of Hamas leaders are being used to store missiles and other weapons, and it said the hit on Rayan's home triggered secondary explosions from the stockpile there.

Late Thursday, Israeli aircraft hit a mosque in northern Gaza. The military said it was a "terror center," and large quantities of explosives stored there caused secondary blasts that set a fire.

Seven other Palestinians were killed in air strikes Thursday and one died of earlier injuries.

Openly defiant

Amid his targeted Hamas leaders many times in the past, and the current leadership went into hiding at the start of Israel's offensive. Rayan, however, was known for openly defying Israel and in the past had led crowds in the streets of a massive anti-Israel rally—as if daring Israel to strike and risk the lives of civilians.

Residents said he openly went to a nearby mosque on Thursday morning to pray.

In his last interview, recorded with Hamas TV on Wednesday, Rayan was defiant to the end.

"To fighters, know that you will be victorious," he said. "God promises us either victory or martyrdom. God is greater than they (Israelis) are, God is greater than their planes, God is greater than their rockets."

The military said it had intelligence that those vows a second Israeli hit home for use as an escape route.

MYSTERY An Israeli air strike on Jan. 1 finally hit Hamas senior leader Nizar Rayan who's described as a hardliner on the Israeli scale. Also killed were his four wives and nine of his 12 children. AP

Because by the hit, Israel seemed determined to press ahead with strikes on Hamas homes. It is also targeting government buildings—emptied days ago by evacuations—as well as rocket launching sites and smuggling tunnels along the border with Egypt.

"We are trying to hit every body who is a leader of the organization, and today we hit one of their leaders," Israeli Vice Premier Eitan Cabel said in a television interview.

480 Gazans killed

More than 480 Gazans have been killed and some 1,700 have been wounded since Israel embarked on its aerial campaign, Gaza health officials said. The UN says the Gaza death toll includes more than 60 civilians, 34 of them children.

So far, the campaign has been conducted largely from the air. But military spokesperson Maj. Avital Leibovich said preparations for a ground operation were complete.

"The infantry, the artillery and other forces are ready. They're around the Gaza Strip, waiting for any calls to go inside," Leibovich said.

Thousands of soldiers were massed along the border with Gaza on Thursday, backed by tanks and artillery. Israeli ground troops watched warplanes and attack helicopters flying into Gaza, cheering each time they heard the explosions of its hit strike.

Hamas revenge

Hamas threatened to take revenge against Israeli land forces should they cross into Gaza.

"We are waiting for you to enter Gaza to kill you or make you into 'schalits,'" Hamas said. Israeli Sgt. Gilad Schalit was seized in a cross-border raid by Hamas-affiliated militants 2 and a half years ago and remains in captivity in Gaza.

Israel's bombing campaign has not deterred militants from launching Israel. According to the military, rocket squads fired more than 30 rockets Thursday, by late afternoon.

3-day truce

No injuries were reported, but an eight-story house in Ashdod, 27 km from Gaza, was hit. Panicked residents ran through a debris-strewn street.

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reshuffled a French proposal for a two-day suspension of hostilities to allow for the delivery of humanitarian supplies. Israel has been allowing weekend relief supplies to enter Gaza. Ninety aid trucks crossed the border Thursday.

Still, Olmert seemed to be looking for a diplomatic way out, telling US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other world leaders that Israel wouldn't agree to a truce unless international monitors took responsibility for enforcing it, government officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were confidential. AP

This phone plays flute, flings a monkey, counts calories, etc.

SO YOUR CELL PHONE HAS A brushed-metal shell, can flip and slide four ways and has more features than an airplane cockpit. Big deal.

The new status symbol is what your phone can do—count calories, teach Spanish, simulate a flute, or fling a monkey from a tree.

With the advent of touch-screen technology and faster networks, announcing the new competition and cool factor reaches around thousands of feet, quirky (and even useful) programs that run on the phones.

The popularity of such applications for Apple's iPhone, the leader of the smartphone pack, is driving a fierce competition among the makers of the BlackBerry and Palm devices, and even Google and Microsoft.

Bag of tricks

In a breath, a new era in the stores of a mobile device—the phone is no longer a fashion statement but a digital bag of tricks.

"Just having the iPhone a year ago was special, but now you have to extend that," said Kristin Gist, executive director of the Center for Mobile Communication Studies at Rutgers. "The hype are a wonderful, solid and usually useful of user-personal bragging rights."

"It's status for the rest of us," he said.

10,000 programs

Since July, Apple has posted more than 10,000 programs to its App Store; 9 out of every 10 iPhone users have downloaded applications—more than 300 million overall, though those include software updates and repeat downloads. Some applications are free (like Skeeza, which lets you download and read books), while others typically cost $1 to $30.

Other applications help users navigate roads, find friends and local restaurants, and play addictive games, including one called "Super Stickman," in which the user swings the phone in the air to tilt the character in animated monkey on the screen.

Aging app

Recognizing the business opportunities, the other major cell phone and software companies are getting into the app act.

Google recently introduced the Android Market, selling applications based on Android, its operating system for cell phones. In the spring, Research in Motion plans to introduce an application store for its BlackBerry devices. Palm is thinking of removing its software strategy, while Microsoft is in the early stages of creating its own store for phones running Windows Mobile.

New business

Matt Murphy, a venture capitalist at Kleiner Perkins, which operates a $100-million fund for iPhone application developers, said this was a new kind of business, selling people not the phone itself, but the applications that turn some with it.

"What you can do on a phone is altering the kind people buy," Murphy said. "Whatever phone offers the best applications wins." NYT

'08 over but Mariel's 100 'kwitis' still unlit

From page A1

unto Area Command, and the actual date of the release would depend on the guerrilla unit holding the officer, warning that continued military action to Compostela Valley could delay the release.

Cammayo, commander of the Army's 11th Special Forces Company, was captured during a two-day encounter in Sitio Anagayan in Mendaya.

Blindfolded, handcuffed

According to witnesses, the young officer was also wounded in the fighting, was blindfolded and handcuffed after the rebels took him.

Up to now, Mariel only has the courage and the love to cheer on his wife in her street fight husband's condition.

"Everything, I get hold of the papers until I get online just to look for more updates about his condition, about his release, which the NPA earlier pledged 'out of goodwill,'" said the 29-year-old Mariel who is just a month away from giving birth to her first child.

"But if my husband's release is out of goodwill, why are they taking so long to do it? Why are they setting so many conditions?" she asked.

Ups and downs

Mariel said she received word last Dec. 26 that Cammayo would be freed on Dec. 31. Two days later, she received another information that the NPA could not proceed with the release due to "continuing military offensives."

Then she learned that her husband's abduction might release him by Jan. 1, the end of a holiday ceasefire which the Armed Forces of the Philippines had declared in its war with the NPA.

"I even pleaded with the military to refrain to ground operations to make way for the release of my husband. I may have offended the military by saying so but I am just eager for his release," Mariel said.

On New Year's Eve, upon receiving a report that the NPA would push through with Cammayo's release on Jan. 1, Mariel went to the market and bought 100 kwitis (baby rockets).

Prayers heard

She had planned on lighting them up during the New Year revelry to minimize her husband's return to freedom.

"I was excited. I went to church to schedule a thanksgiving Mass—that finally my prayers were heard," she said.

At around 5 p.m. on Dec. 31, she received the bad news. He wouldn't be coming home on New Year's Day.

"I am angry and hurt at the same time. I just wish that the NPA will be honest and true to their word. It's really hurt for me," she cried. "I hope they just tell me whether I will see my husband again or not," she said.

The doors have closed of the army from the New Year's Eve revelry. But Mariel is still hanging on to her rockets.

LADY IN WAITING Mariel Cammayo, wife of Lt. Vicente Cammayo who has been held by the NPA since Nov. 7 is hoping her husband would be released any day now especially because she's just a few days away from giving birth to their first child. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

COMMANDING HOME Lt. Vicente Cammayo was company commander of the Army's 11th Special Forces Company in Mendaya, Compostela Valley when abducted by the NPA after an encounter. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Green ringtones trill, howl, hoot, screech...

From page A1

make political statements with their seemingly omnipresent speaker systems went largely unexplored. But that was before endangered species ringtones went born.

Now, Dave Gilmin to the ski slopes of the French Alps, from Manchester to Brazil, tens of thousands of users choose a hoot, trill, screech, croak or emit the haunting song of whales.

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group based in Arizona, knows more for litigating on behalf of endangered species than building a choral repertoire around them, introduced the ringtones in 2006 and has been counting downloads the way Billboard counts album sales. The tentally: 200,000, a milestone of sorts. (They are most popular, after the United States and Britain, in China and Iran.)

It's powerful

Bumper stickers produce instant reactions, yes and no, and Peter Galvin, the center's conservation director, has such a visible source. In addition, "People don't already have their favorites on the home they receive their information. It's powerful. Any kind of music or sound influences people and lose people click."

The list of more than 40 sounds has expanded to include animals that, though not yet endangered, can lark it out with the best of them, like the pika, a rodent dwelling in the Southwestern mountains in the United States, whose real chirps are indistinguishable from human. The killer whale and the Mexican gray wolf, both endangered, are currently No. 1 and 2 on the charts.

But watch out

It is considered open downloaders to remember what they downloaded. Grace Matthews, a 19-year-old biology student at the University of Birmingham in England, took a dating holiday last week in the French Alps. At one point, she dined away from her companions and into a snowy field to make a phone call. Meeting at a good clip on the snowplows, she was startled by the howl of a wolf.

"I very nearly crashed," Matthews said in an interview. And, in a separate e-mail message, she added, "It took me several seconds to realize that I was being phoned, and not taunted..." New York Times News Service

Pangandamans ask bloggers to stop attacks

From page A1

to the feelings of others. The past few days have been very painful for us," he said, referring to bloggers who have posted angry comments against his family.

The Sucsucan called Pangandaman, a member of the government peace panel, to get an update on the stalled peace talks with separatist rebels in the southern Philippines. When asked about the incident, he preferred not his sentiments.

'Unfortunate incident'

The Pangandamans have reaped a storm of criticism in the press and on the Web after Dela Paz's daughter detailed in her blog how two sons of the bureaucrat allegedly beat her 8-year-old brother, Beau.

The tempus started when the Dela Paz boys accused the Pangandaman group of breaching etiquette by purportedly overtaking their flight while the two families were playing golf.

Pangandaman has apologized to the public over the "unfortunate incident" but maintained that his sons—Mayor Numer Jr. of Maisi, Lanao del Norte and Hamsir—did not instigate the fight.

Pangandaman said the Valley Golf management and the Aquino police had launched their investigation and the public should desist to this.

Search for solution

"Let the law take its course. I hope there will be a solution to this," Pangandaman said.

He said he had asked his family not to respond to the criticisms and the angry blogs, even as their lawyers study the possibility of filing counterclaims against the Dela Paz family.

"We didn't go to the golf club to pick a fight. I invited my sons to the club to bond with them because I seldom see them. I guess that's my only fault," he said, regretting that he ever asked them to play.

"Nobody wanted this to happen. I've been playing golf for 20 years and this is the first time my family was dragged [into a mess like this]."

Spare GMA

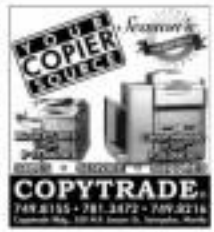
Pangandaman said his son's 6-year-old grandson witnessed the violence, and was traumatized by it.

He appealed to the public not to drag the Cabinet and President Maria Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo into the controversy, saying he would deal with this "personal problem."

"They should not rule on the issue," he said, referring to the farmers who have signed an online petition for his ouster and for a review of his deputies' moves, charging that he has never fully backed their struggle for a genuine agrarian reform.

Pangandaman, who has rebuffed calls for his resignation, said he wasn't aware of any impending Cabinet overhaul.

"I'm not aware of any revamps. I was with the President for two days, and this was never mentioned," he said.



BARBEE Dela Paz, a golf scholar at the University of Cincinnati, reacts after making a par putt at The Country Club in Bria, Nasa, Laguna, in this photo taken on Dec. 31, 2006. Barbee's blog on the Valley Golf incident set off a torrent of protests against the Pangandamans on the Web. MELANIE MARQUEZ

No golf talk . . .

From page A1

told the Inquirer yesterday.

Dela Paz said his son Beau, a top junior golfer and an Ateneo de Manila high school freshman, had actually rare some of Agnedan Barbee Inverway Nasser Pangandaman and their companions of beating them after an argument about golf courtesy.

Bamboo said becoming head-line news had been hard on the family, as they felt silenced and drained by all the attention.

"So as Beau Beau, we just stayed home with a few close friends," she said, "We made it a point not to talk about Valley Golf."

'We feel stronger'

The incident could lead to a long legal battle.

"As of right now, we've a bit stronger because of all the support we're getting. There's still a feeling of pressure and fear because of who we're up against, but right now, we feel stronger," said Bamboo, who has been assigned to family spokesperson.

A golf scholar at the University of Cincinnati, Bamboo said her friends from school, who learned about what happened from blogs and news on the Internet, were all "horrified." Through e-mail and long distance calls, they told her they were praying for her.

More than 1,000 bloggers have expressed support for their family in the comments section of her online journal. Bamboo said her parents "were just overwhelmed."

Many others have offered encouragement, including a group from the University of the Philippines College of Law, she said.

Beau can't forget

Interviewed on ABS-CBN's "Umagang Kay Ganda," Dela Paz said a family lawyer had advised them to be well prepared, with all their documents ready, especially as a "high-profile" case like theirs.

The Dela Paz boys have filed a complaint for physical injuries and the Pangandamans have threatened a countersuit.

Beau, in the TV interview, said he could not forget the sight of Pangandaman's companions allegedly pulling out their guns when he (Beau) was already in the clinic to be treated for his wounds.

Bamboo, who is flying back in the US on Jan. 7 to resume her studies, said her father and her brother had not played golf since the incident. "I don't know how I'll feel when I go back to the golf course," she said.

No outside influence

Bamboo appealed to netizens for to "find it in their hearts" to conduct an impartial investigation and not to be swayed by outside influences.

She said the possibility of her family withdrawing their complaint was unlikely "as of right now."

"All the support we're getting, it's giving us strength to keep fighting ... They say prayer makes you strong and we believe it does. Now we leave everything to God," she said.

Online petitions for the resignation of Pangandaman have picked up in cyberspace.

Ang Kapatiran

The Ang Kapatiran Party has launched its own online petition asking for the resignation not only of Pangandaman but also of his son Nasser Jr., mayor of Maisi, Lanao del Sur.

Efrilito Barrera from Bacacay de Sulu in Laguna also called for the elder Pangandaman's resignation.

Ang Kapatiran's petition, already has 84 signatories. The [illegible] have 60.

Ang Kapatiran is the same group that fielded candidates in the last elections on an "anti-trapo" land-traditional politicians] platform.

The group called on the Arroyo administration "to ensure the speedy resolution of this criminal/administrative case and that those responsible [illegible] be prosecuted." With a report from Alexis Pajo

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- MS Word
  January 23 (PM)
- MS Excel
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- MS Powerpoint
  February 10 (PM)
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- Setting up an Internet Shop
  March 4 - 5
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  March 16 - 18

* Schedules are subject to change without prior notice.

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ISSN 0115-2042 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER Vol. 29 No. 25

OPINION

Relief and optimism

EDITORIAL

THE YEAR JUST PAST WAS CAUGHT IN A WEB OF crises (the rice crisis, the oil crisis, the economic crisis), scandals (NBN-ZTE, fertilizer scam, "ra-ra" generals, "Alabang boys") and lies (MOA on ancestral domain, no-term-extension Charter change). It must be said, however, that 2008 ended on two positive notes.

Oil prices in the global market, which had been soaring to dizzying record highs since July 2007 and peaked at $147 in July 2008, plummeted to $33 early last month, a range last seen in 2004. Then a personal survey found that despite a darkening economic horizon, 52 percent of Filipinos nevertheless believe 2009 will turn out to be a lot better for them. The nation's never-say-die spirit is very much alive.

A word of caution though: This feeling of relief and optimism should not lull us into complacency. To recall an apparently long-forgotten Filipino school fable, the ripe guava is not going to fall down by itself into the mouth of the waiting, lazy and famished Juan. Opportunities have to be seized, the future has to be built—or won.

Yet, it would be a grave mistake to believe that we're over the hump of the oil crisis. This should be clear from the recent upshift in oil prices, which breached the $40 per barrel mark many times in December, mainly because of the renewed hostilities in Gaza; the rise underscored how volatile oil prices still are. And last we forgot, the steep $114 drop in oil prices was not prompted by a rosy turn of events but was more of an offshoot of the world's grim economic conditions.

This means the Philippines remains in the shadow of the oil crisis species. And it can't get itself from out of the shadow by just waiting for oil prices to fall. The problem lies not in the prices, which rise and fall beyond our control. The problem lies in our heavy reliance on imported fuels for our energy needs. (Although the share of imported oil in our energy mix has been declining these past years, it remains high—more than 44 percent in 2007.) It goes without saying that the solution is not in cheap prices but in energy security or independence.

But energy security has been our primary policy thrust through several administrations since Marcos'. There is no question the Arroyo administration is also looking in that direction. Its energy program is targeting to make the country 60-percent energy self-sufficient by 2010. In 2006, it passed the Biofuels Act and, only last December, the Renewable Energy Act. Aside from dipping into natural resources available locally (geothermal, water, natural gas, coal, oil), our country has started tapping new technologies (solar energy, wind farms, electric jeepneys and tricycles, hybrid vehicles, ethanol, coco-biodiesel).

But even after four decades of pursuing energy independence, we seem to be a long way off from the 60-percent energy self-sufficiency target. We continue to hear of extensive brownouts in some parts of the country and a looming power crisis. Our ethanol program has hardly taken off but already there is talk of importing more ethanol to meet demand, and of food shortage as ethanol production threatens to eat up into food supplies and encroach on agricultural lands. Even as we have yet to solidify our gains on the energy front, the challenges keep mounting.

Which makes the need to achieve energy security imperative—but more so not only because it is the surest and most pragmatic way to the future, but also because in a bleak economy, some of the initiatives taken in pursuit of this goal would create more jobs locally and even help address one of the world's persistent day problems, which is global warming.

All this gives government leaders, especially those in Malacañang and Congress, greater reason to take the lead in this undertaking with as much urgency, earnestness, resolve and creativity as they usually show in defending and raising their pork barrel allocations, in pushing for Charter change and in killing impeachment complaints.

Now that would be a real basis for relief and optimism.

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The unbearable weight of a new year

PUBLIC LIVES

Randy David

BECAUSE IT IS THE BEGINNING OF THE year, I am told—I suppose like everyone else—between hope and anxiety as I look ahead to the unfolding of the rest of 2009. Everything I have read in the last three months has created a far more critical state than the one that has just ended. Expect a point a percent of a new phase in the global economy, a new era filled with opportunity, danger and difficulty. But, since hardship has never been a strangers to us Filipinos, perhaps there is not much that deserves to surprise us. Thus we tend to dismiss the direst warnings with an air of fatalism.

It is easy to mix recognize this as optimism. Optimism belongs to those who see themselves as effective agents of history, rather than as mere spectators of passing events. I do not see the 92 percent of Filipinos that the Social Weather Stations recently reported as hopeful about 2009 are real optimists. I see them more as "bahala na" fatalists.

Filipino fatalism is not passive. It is often reckless, a manifestation of reliance on the gods of providence. Instead of being resigned to the way things are at any given moment, Filipinos take chances and live risky with equanimity. They thrive on instinct rather than on knowledge, and are not easily deterred by failure. They affirm life unilaterally, instead of worrying over it. Found the love of their life? Good. Got kind of lost but believes that if you have so little in life to start with, you don't have much to lose if you venture out.

We have never been afraid of the new. In fact we readily take it on, partly because there is not much of our relatively young culture that is solid enough to ground and hold us. I think it is this attitude that has allowed us to slide into modernity—the belief that "everything solid melts into air"—without much difficulty. I have always believed that this is what accounts for the unique adaptability of our intrepid overseas Filipino workers.

Somewhat less often been associated with ni-

billars, the injection of all values. This is quite understandable, but also ironic. While Socrates rejected existing values, he was far from advocating a way of living in which everything is permissible. He rejected received values not because he did not believe in living according to certain standards, but because he thought that human beings must deliberately choose their values in the light of changing circumstances. If they are to be of service to life, values should furnish our sense of discipline, he said. They must, in his words, be our "furthest and necessary."

In a world that has become more complex every year, in which doctrines that have ordained the test of time suddenly fail, where material fortunes built over many generations evaporate overnight, it is easy to find justification for the reckless fatalism of the Filipino. But this is not a rationalization inherent in the intelligence of the modern world. Instead of pushing beyond the frontiers of modern science in a quest for new directions, such a way of life commonly falls back into the illusions of premodern superstition. A tradition "anything goes" attitude is a self-defeating response to complexity: it does not affirm life; it destroys and dishonors it.

When one has lived long, it becomes easy to believe that the event as nothing endures in the world, nothing new is also eternal. Every new year suggests something different, but it also conveys the sense of something eternally recurring. How does one deal with déjà vu? Less to rationalization as to remember the past so as not to be condemned to repeat it. But, Socrates's advice to lovers: I must live with the thought that my actions today will be repeated "once more and innumerable times more." Thus—"What I do or do not do now is an important for everything that is yet to come as to the greatest event of the past."

Comments to public.lives@gmail.com

Delayed SC appointment to put JBC on trial

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

IF THE NEWS REPORTS ARE CORRECT, Malacañang has already started the new year wrong: it has reportedly decided to postpone for more than a month the naming of the successor of Supreme Court Justice Ruben Reyes, who retired yesterday. The purported reason is that it will be able to announce two new Supreme Court appointees simultaneously when Justice Adolf Azcuna retires on Feb. 8.

Why should a one-month wait to replace a retiring justice be considered a wrong against the court of President Macapagal-Arroyo? The only has to look at some court statistics to see why. The Supreme Court has the largest case backlog per judge/justice among the courts, starting from the regional trial courts. In 2006, the last year that the high tribunal released any data on its case activities, that backlog had reached 6,861 cases, or an average of 439 cases per justice, as compared to, say, 339 cases per Court of Appeals justice, and 230 cases per RTC judge for the same period. Allowing that large backlog to increase through mere procrastination by the appointing power (whom is very sensitive and rightly so to the justice-delayed-justice-denied principle. In successive terms, again using the 2006 figures for the sake, how can the Supreme Court regain transparency in government when it displays more?), the one-month delay translates to 28 cases unadjudicated.

But that's just the quantity side—the less-the number of justices working, the greater the backlog, e.g. By far the most important is the quality side—the qualifications of justices, as. Grip or proposed, also contribute to backlogs, as well as to other appointive jurisdictions. And with seven Supreme Court justices (including Reyes) scheduled to retirement until 2009, the question of the quality of their replacements is what is driving the move for reforms in the process of their selection, coming from such quarters as the Judicial and Bar Council, which is tasked with coming up with the list of candidates from which the President must select, as well as from civil society groups (I am a member of one of them).

What does this have to do with Malacañang's one-month delay? It has been speculated, but without basis, that by appointing two justices simultaneously, the naming of a candidate who is widely theorized highly qualified, will remove some of the attention from—and mute the public's disapproval of—the naming of a Malacañang-favored/questionably qualified candidate. In other words, Malacañang is hoping to sneak in the candidate without too much controversy.

The person at the center of the controversy is Solicitor General Agnes Devanadera, who is a close ally and devoted follower of President Arroyo, and who has served as her general counsel and acting secretary of justice. Devanadera was disqualified by the JBC as a candidate because of a JBC rule that anyone who has a pending administrative/criminal case in government is disqualified. But that rule for disqualification is a minor deterrent, because the powers that be are moving heaven and earth to get her cases dismissed one way or another, and it looks like they are sure to succeed within the month.

As for me I am concerned, though, there are much more substantive objections to Devanadera's appointment. Both as general counsel and as undersecretary and later as acting justice secretary, she has made egregious errors that I have on three about. One had to do with primarily giving the multibillion-peso assets of the Philippine National Construction Company (PNCC), bail, stock and barrel, away to a creditor (Basilconi) whose claims were at best weak. Another was to sit on a case involving her business partners and partner (former Justice Secretary Fernando Perez). And the most recent had to do with the Delgado murder case, where she did the usual opportunistic thing—lightning (jumping over) almost 6,000 pending cases), she reversed the decision of the prosecutor to dismiss the case against Ludivy Gonzales for lack of probable cause. I say faster than lightning, because it took her all of six working days to make the switch vote of documents on top of going about all her other duties as acting justice secretary, and her decision was written so poorly to boot—imagine giving those different dates for the murder of Delgado. Frankly I hope the JBC can withstand Malacañang pressure to open up on its list. It is untenable, the Filipino people will have to bear with her for 11 years [illegible].

It is imperative, for the country's sustained growth and development, to fill the vacancies in the Supreme Court with those who combine competence and integrity with hard minds. It is, after all, regarded as the last bastion of our democracy. A good Supreme Court can compensate for an otherwise lousy justice system; a bad Supreme Court can nullify an otherwise excellent justice system. We seem to have a severe combination: a lousy justice system, and a Supreme Court where justice can be trumped by other considerations.

I speak from experience: I recently attended a Supreme Court hearing where oral arguments were being heard by a division of the Court, and I respectfully appealed to two of the five attending justices decided to take a public service, while a third was obviously bored and asking some pretty leading questions. Incredible. The experience has led me to use the case (the Delgado-Gonzales murder case) to illustrate everything (but to wrong God right) with the Philippine justice system—from the prosecution all the way to the Supreme Court. Abangan.

Personal versus social concerns of 2008

LAST MONDAY, SNS REPORTED THAT NINE out of 10 Filipinos say they look forward to the New Year with hope, a rather done feat, according to the fourth quarter Social Weather Survey completed in the start of December. This is similar to the optimism for the New Year at the close of the past few years.

But such belief, based on the same survey, SNS reported that two-out of three expected their coming Christmas to be happy one out of how expected it to be another happy not sad, and only the remaining few expected it to be sad. In the previous four years that these questions were asked, the number of hers in 2002 and 2003, it used to be that four out of five expected a happy Christmas.

Looking towards 2009 with hope, and looking forward to joy at the 2008 Christmas, are examples of personal outcome. They are personal. Another than overall, concrete ones people can look to divided responsibility for these things, rather than expect others, or some social institutions, to take collective responsibility for them.

In the Philippines, surveys show that, for the nately, the capacities for personal hope and happiness are very widespread. Filipinos, on the other hand, are more than the rest of the world. This is an achievement of the people, and not of their government, even though the latter may be tempted to claim credit for it.

Personal and hunger. Poverty and hunger, on the other hand, are not only personal but also social concerns. For one thing, many private individuals and organizations, feeling their consciences pricked, give help to the poor and to the hungry, even without being asked.

What's significant, however, the government has long recognized the reduction of poverty and hunger as among its specific responsibilities. Thus the government sets official targets for reduction, in such economic suffering, and programs official programs for accomplishing these. Not usually, the poor and hungry have a right to expect such programs, aided from the government from their suffering.

On the other hand, the government does not, and never has, set minimum targets for New Year

Social Climate

Mahar Mangahas

hope and Christmas joy. It does not, and need not, accept complaints from seasons pessimistic about 2009 and sad about the 2008 Christmas.

During 2008, SWS noted, Pinoys fluctuated both upwards and downwards in the quarterly surveys. In general, it did not improve in 2008 compared to 2007, notwithstanding recent years, paper ads, placed by unknown sources, pointing to the decline from the second to the third quarters the PNPs poverty report for the fourth quarter will be released soon.

Involuntary hunger, on the other hand, hit a new national record high of 22.7 percent of families in the fourth quarter (one my relevant of Dec. 27). This is a very serious social concern. The estimate is based on a survey of 1,500 families. They pay have a right to an accounting of who benefits of from the P46 billion spent by the National Food Authority to import rice in 2008.

Good government. Needless to say good government is primary for a social concern, rather than a personal concern. The most widely used indicator of good government is the citizens' evaluation of the performance of the chief executive.

Throughout 2008, public dissatisfaction about the performance of President Macapagal-Arroyo was extreme. Her net rating in the fourth SWS survey of the year (Dec. 20 to Dec. 1, 2008), there were 29 percent satisfied and 53 dissatisfied, giving a net satisfaction rating of -24. (The balance from 100 percent said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, the neutral option is chosen in respondent-to-door in the is have to face interviews by SWS.)

Her average net satisfaction in the 1993 surveys for 2008 was -30, compared to -9 in 2007, -10 in 2006, and -25 in 2005. From the third quarter of 2004 to the present, or four and a half years, all of her net satisfaction ratings in the SWS surveys have been negative. Although her unpopularity declined somewhat in 2006 and 2007, it surged again in 2008, hitting its worst point at -30 in July.

It is instructive to compare the survey records of President Arroyo and our going United States President George W. Bush (source: http://abcnews.com/politicspoll), who have both been in office since late January 2001.

During the Dec. 1-6, 2008, survey of Americans approved, and 68 percent of them disapproved, of President Bush's handling of his job, giving him a net approval rating of -38. (By the way, aside borrowing "approved" instead of "satisfied," typical US polls, since done by telephone, do not usually offer a neutral response.)

Throughout 2008, President Bush's net survey ratings ranged from -11 to -50, for which a crude estimate is the total point of -40. From April 2001 to the present, all of his net ratings were negative. The mid-point of the net ratings were -32 in 2007, -39 in 2006, and -32 in 2005.

In contrast, after taking office in January 2001, Bush's honeymoon net rating was +52. It zoomed to +74 after the September 11 attack, and in a record +86 in October 2001. During his first year, he was negative (slightly) only during May to August 2002, afterwards it was at most +18, upon his re-election in November. After three months of his second term, his net rating was negative and increasingly worse, i.e., more and more of a handicap (though not the record for his children). I think the longest battle for the presidency was between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Question. 1. How much chance would a candidate endorsed by Glenn Macapagal-Arroyo have in 2010? 2. Who would most unite the opposition against this candidate?

Contact SWS: www.sws.org.ph or mahar.mangahas@sws.org.ph.

The greatest Filipino ever

'Rizal would lose his head for writing the 'Noli Me Tangere.'"
—Padre Pedro de Sanza, S.J., a friend of Rizal

LOOKING BACK TO THE YEAR 1887, ONE CAN see how seventy-why national hero Jose Rizal was considered Spain's greatest enemy in the Philippines. Ironically, the year 1887 was the year Rizal was depicted as a mild, mannered gentleman, he was neither brash nor ill-tempered. Although he was an expert marksman and boxer, he neither held a gun nor brandished a sword against an enemy.

Rizal was considered as remarkably educated, a genius as many had called him. He was a polyglot, one who could speak 22 or more languages. He knew 22, including the ancient languages of Sanskrit and Latin. He was also a polymath, one who is exemplary in so many skills and sciences, for we are excellent surgeon, and a brilliant writer and poet. In 1887, he wrote the "Noli Me Tangere." The clever use of wit and humor would have made the "Spanish" novel a bestseller during that period. It, however, depicted the abuses and corruption of the Spanish officials, as well as that of the friars, the Catholic priests.

In August 1896, Rizal's prediction in the "El Filibusterismo" came true. Andres Bonifacio and his Katipunan launched a full-scale rebellion, first attacking the Spanish garrison in San Juan del Monte, in Manila. The surprising finger was quickly

Commentary

George M. Rizon

pointed by the Spaniards at Rizal as the man with gone of this rebellion. Rizal denied involvement, as he was already incarcerated in the last four years in Zamboanga. To keep him away from the revolt, Governor General Ramon Blanco offered Rizal a job in Cuba, where a similar rebellion was taking place. (The way to treat patients suffering from yellow fever.) Rizal accepted the offer.

While on a stopover in Barcelona, Spain en route to Cuba, Rizal's ship was ordered back to Manila. Arrested upon arrival, Rizal was tried by a military court and found guilty of all the above charges of rebellion, sedition and illegal association. He was to be shot on Dec. 30, 1896 on order of the new Governor General Camilo Polavieja. Blanco, who was sympathetic to Rizal, had been forced out of office, and the friars used their influence to have Polavieja take his place, thereby sealing Rizal's fate.

The Spaniards "pacified" the Rizal, though that by executing Rizal, the rebellion would weaken just like in the case of Father Gomez, Burgos and Zamora when they were executed after the Cavite Mutiny of 1872). The news could not be suppressed, for Rizal's death aroused the fighting spirit of the Filipinos all the more.

After two years of fighting, and with the international help of the Americans (Admiral George Dewey brought back Aguinaldo from Hong Kong and destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898), the Filipino revolutionaries defeated the Spanish army (capturing 15,000 of its forces outright) and officially ended Spain's 333-year rule.

On June 12, 1898, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo declared the independence of the Philippine islands from foreign occupation, the first Asian country to do so in Asia. It was quite sad that Rizal did not live long enough to see what he really were 10—10. Independent country for its Filipinos. Though, I think that if he had his way he wanted it attained through a nonviolent fashion.

Rizal's execution. Rizal's execution was short lived though; the American took over the country after a few months.

Fifty years later, a man named Mahatma Gandhi, adopted and perfected Rizal's nonviolent "recipe" for independence. Gandhi's approach led to India's independence. Americans also used Rizal's nonviolent approach to gain independence from India in 1947. Soon, other Asian nations would follow.

Earlier, in 1946, the Philippines regained independence from the Americans. Indonesia won their independence from the Dutch in 1949. Vietnam fought a war against the French and won it in 1954. Malaysia and Singapore had theirs from the British in 1957.

Asian struggle against colonialism was a long and arduous one. It was naturally an one from Dr. Jose Rizal, which he wrote the "Noli Me Tangere" in 1887. Rizal's work was even called by an Indonesian neighbor "The Great Malay" but no, he never was. Jose Rizal is "The greatest Filipino ever."

George M. Rizon is currently serving as Ateneo's Blue Mood Magazine.

A beautiful reality

THREE YEARS OF EVIL ALWAYS LIGHT OF EVERY TIME, there is never a time I will be coming home soon, or remember more thought that I will be coming there again. Those can be long to say how friends: Papa, 71; Mama, 62; and Lola, 96.

I am an only child, a quarter of a century old, independent for 12 years, and I have lived in 13 different places since 1996—alone, but not quite so. It give an idea of how physically detached I am from my family. But even my family, the only time I spent my real birthday with them was in 1998. The same thing goes for their birthdays.

Young Blood

Joy V. de los Reyes

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twenty-something and below. —Ed.

It took my parents 30 years of marriage to have me. I only get to visit them 88 to 90 times in a year maximum. That is if I don't engage to any income-generating activities during the summer break. Yes, I know, we have a weird family set-up.

Previous blogs may means family and stability and that is why until now, I haven't invited any friends to my house, even my closest pals. I am not being selfish, it is just that a person will find my soul there, figuratively speaking.

One place is like any other but-is. Not primitive but not too civilized either. Not the thing but somewhat hidden. Every time I go home, it is as if I am going back in history, as to speak. The night sky is filled with endless fireflies against on the counterpart of lamp posts in Manila. People still sleep right beam a day. There are no graveyard shifts, except for the dogs running around and the dogs and chickens in the background. The last to go to sleep are people who play pool or some home after a dance at another barangay or a visit to a friend. Here, there is no dance floor, there is just the endless sky, the infinite stars and fireflies.

If I am very lucky, I get to watch the moon rise behind Mayon Volcano. It is an exquisite view whose every detail I can remember without the help of a photograph. I don't even bother to take pictures; it spoils the beauty of the moment. It is just here it is. Beauty attains its summit when it is transitory. The time of nature does the trick.

Our ancestral home is half-ruinous, half-restorous. Half ruinous because almost all the things stored in it can be considered historic. This was not deliberate. My family is not to re-collecting antiques. When I got bored, I would go on a treasure hunt at home and find anything, from old kitchen utensils to a collection of copies of Reader's Digest from the 1950s to the 1970s. There are also old books and some furniture. There are also books and novels, some paintings of my great-grandparents and black and white photographs of members of the clan lying around the place, including those up pictures of dead people inside their coffins.

There it is my best friends' men. Lola is the de facto mayordomo of the house who keeps something everyone, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a person sane, healthy and wise." Well, who am I to argue? She is a 96-year old lady with 20/20 eye sight, and she still can never function, including an old sun's table, bars and chairs. My father, on the other hand, normally wakes up at midnight to rummage through the refrigerator for anything he can chew. My parents and I usually talk about the day's events after dinner and my favorite topic is my encounters with death. Early in the morning, Mama wakes me up and my eyes, and later my stomach, will feast on my favorite dishes all laid on the table. That's the way she shows her love for us. And she knows all the secrets that I cannot tell any other soul. She is the family's disciplinarian and the most practical of all practical animals who inhabit this earth.

In one of our conversations, I asked Mama a simple question: "Was it hard having me girl?" With a playful laugh in her eyes, she answered, "What do you think? You don't have to be intelligent to know the answer." Then, in a serious tone, she added, "There are as many ways of loving, but there is a proper way of doing it. And choosing that proper way is the hardest thing we can do." Then she says that their loyalty still real love. It is either you're stuck here with us and nothing good happens in your life or we let you go and guide you so that you can live your life to the fullest. Remember that when you have a family of your own. Surely, you know that." She said these words while meaningfully eyeing the big lola she said whenever she felt that I needed a speaking during my childhood.

I was entering high school when my parents physically set me free for the first time. There were many misgivings from relatives and family friends. On one occasion, with the intention of letting me hear what she thought about giving me independence as an early age, Mama said matters of family "We already taught that all the things she needs to know. If she messes up her life, it is not on us who will suffer. It will be her. We gave her the compass, now it is up to her what course to take."

Her words constantly play over and over in my mind.

I have been living on my own in Manila for a decade now. Here, I worry about my food, laundry, budget, studies, among other things. There are times I don't even think of when I am home. It is easy to get lost in all the hustle-bustle of the place. There are so many substitutes for happiness that one's mind would spin just picking which one is a perfect fit. I have met many people and found out it is not difficult to be swayed and to give up my own beliefs and principles. And there are times, both hateful and fun, which compel us to be someone else, and I am not referring that there are truth in a beautiful reality, a reality which become your change. It's like the are among my cards, the lucky clause in a gamble, the last beginner's luck.

In one province, I find the stability of the wonders to me, the reason behind my dreams, the beauty in simplicity, the answer to all the why's, the balm for a shattered soul, the solace in silence, and the home into of eyes that see the real to me as a daughter and as a friend. My parents have given me a unique kind of friendship that knows neither distance nor age.

I guess everyone needs a home—and to cherish it.

Joy V. de los Reyes, 25, is a senior at the San Beda College of Law.

Notice to Youngblood contributors:

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Humanity's stake in Gaza

World View

Václav Havel, Bronislaw Geremek, Desmond Tutu, Hans Kong, Mike Moore, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Karel Schwarzenberg

ARMAH—MINISTRY THERE IS ALWAYS TO BE HOPEful. But to the Middle East, wearing there is of no danger. Despite the fact that there has been little progress in bridging the divide between Palestinians and Israelis. The current air strikes on Gaza, and continuing rocket attacks on Ashdod, Sderot and other towns in southern Israel, only prove how dire the situation has become.

The recent air strikes (but-state between Israel and the Gazan Palestinian leadership) has also led to blockades of food aid by Israel that have left Gaza's 1.5 million people facing conditions of real hunger. Israel, it seems, is once again emphasizing the use of "hard" force over soft, in its dealings with the Palestinians of Gaza, but this focus only serves to block non-violent opportunities for ever-entire solutions to the Israel-Palestine dispute.

Making matters worse, Israeli politicians' rhetoric amounts to further underscore the Israeli's West Bank's Gaza's borders. Pushed to the wall in this way, many Palestinians are beginning to see no other option for fulfilling their national aspirations than radical means. Given that this risks worsened violence, it is critical that Israel's regime of occupation and settlement in the West Bank and Gaza be dismantled. Only in this way can we be sure that Palestinians will not be directed from their strategic objective of achieving an independent state. The Palestinian people will never abandon their national struggle.

Both Israelis and Palestinians must understand that the mere application of force will never be enough to achieve their long-term ends. What a needed is a viable option for the opposing party to adopt in order for violence not to be deployed. Although force sometimes has its uses, a stable and lasting peace can be achieved only by an integrative, compromise solution.

Conflict resolution, if it is to be successful, requires channeling the energy generated by conflict toward constructive and nonviolent alternatives. The direction of the energy of war can take place in any stage of the cycle of violence, but if the requisite peace building is not launched at the first sign of trouble, and persistent means unaddressed as the conflict intensifies (especially if it turns violent), some type of intervention will be needed.

Only then can conciliation, mediation, negotiation, arbitration and collaborative problem-solving processes establish themselves. In the end, intervention and reconciliation are the only viable means to bring stability since it cannot be imposed.

None of this is surprising. But it begs the question of why there has not been a more concerted and concentrated focus on transforming the structural context in favor of the de-escalation and termination for the area to protect the Palestinians from their own more dangerous elements, the Palestinians from the Israelis, and perhaps even the Israelis from themselves, has been proposed, but has not received the attention it should generate.

It is this lack of a coordinated effort to structure an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians—a structure based on an inclusive, interdependent and systemic approach that can shift the variables and lead to a peace that both peoples regard as equal and fair—that most compromises chances of an end to the violence.

One key element in building up a structure for reconciliation must be economic growth. As the World Bank has emphasized repeatedly, there is a strong correlation between poverty and conflict. So bringing the Palestinian dignified, fair trade between haves and have-nots, will be essential to reaching any viable political settlement between Palestinians and Israelis. Yet the efforts have unprecedented—and their insufficient to offer real hope for better lives.

Palestinians and Israelis need to establish stable dialogues across the huge social fissures that divide them, as well as dialogues between the authorities and ordinary people who live in a state of confusion about what is being done in their name. Trust needs to be rebuilt if we are to help the parties understand how to overcome past enmities. Only the beginning of public trust will allow problems to be correctly diagnosed and addressed.

Ultimately, Israel's security must be an absolute priority for all sides, but confidence building measures are needed from all sides as well. What is now needed most of all is a clear message that dialogue, not violence, is the way forward in these very tense times.

In Gaza, morality is basic morality in all states. The suffering and wanton destruction of people's lives, the despair and absence of human dignity in the region have gone on for too long. The Palestinians of Gaza—indeed, all those across the region who lead blighted lives without opportunity—need to be given the protection of international institutions to act. If the Nettle Government is not to become a futile creature, we must wake up and find the moral courage and political vision for a quantum leap in Palestine.

Project Syndicate

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An appeal to Congress

LETTERS

THIS IS A REACTION TO THE news item titled "Chiminis: IOU's long, long wait" by Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, Inquirer, 12/11/08).

Being one of the 18,000-+ victims of human rights violations during the Marcos dictatorial regime who "remain empty-handed," I would like to strongly appeal to our honorable members of the House of Representatives who have "installed and sat" on the Human Rights Compensation bill, to pass the measure before it is too late.

How much longer must we, the victims, wait considering that many of us are "dead, dying, aging, sickly, poor" as pointed out by Doyo? "Hustisa pa ang Justa Ang patay nating kaluwa"

—CRESENTIANO B. VILAR,
Chairperson,
Pagmayaw, Laguna

Severe penalties needed to stop graft and corruption

ANYONE WHO LOVES HIS COUNtry deeply laments its portrayal as one of the most corrupt in Asia. Apparently, the efforts to stop corruption (e.g., investigations and sentences) have been ineffective, tending as they did in the conviction of only a few minor government officials. On the other hand, cases of the so-called "big fish" are left unnoted for years, if not dropped.

Being a former prosecutor and member of the bench and now a practitioner with ample opportunities to observe public officials, allow me to make the following suggestions.

First of all, let's focus on the existing penal laws on graft and corruption. These laws must be amended by treating any case of graft and corruption as a crime against public order like rebellion, subversion or sedition, the penalty of which must always be a straight one—no minimum and maximum periods; the convicts are disqualified from the benefits of the probation law and plea bargaining.

The existing penalties must also be amended to make them heavier. As noted by Malaysian Nat. Bright rising professor (JAIL Ivid Hussein (who has studied the sociology of corruption in Asia for the last 30 years), in his book "Corruption and The Destiny of Asia," the "absence of severe punitive measures does not awaken the necessary loyalty and devotion capable of inhibiting corruption."

Secondly, under present rules, the prescribed periods for terminating preliminary investigations and trials and for rendering the corresponding resolutions or decisions are too long. This gives the culprit in the meantime to stay in office, enjoy their ill-gotten wealth and find ways to delay the resolution of their cases, thus creating the impression that the government is not serious in its campaign against corruption. These proceedings should be shortened by reducing the prescribed periods by one-half. For example, the resolution on preliminary investigations should be turned within a one-or-two-month 30-day period, revocable within 60 days and a court decision, within a non-extendable 45-day period instead of within 90 days—after submission of the case for resolution or decision.

Thirdly, where corruption cases involve sums of money or property to be recovered, the restraint of arrest should be accompanied by a writ of preliminary attachment of the property or property involved.

Fourthly, the prosecutors and judges should be sanctioned for failure to comply with the prescribed timelines. (e.g., Their salaries, benefits or privileges should be withheld.)

Finally, to ensure compliance with the rule on the termination of preliminary investigations and trials within the prescribed period, the issuance of temporary restraining order or injunction, which unduly delay the proceedings, should not be allowed.

All other measures to stop corruption will be unconvincing and only surface these rules, and the quest for a clean, effective and honest government will remain an impossible dream.

—JUSTICE MANUEL B. PADAOA,
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Legaspi Village, Makati City

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Cory's apology in line with pursuit of true democracy

INQUIRER'S DEC. 26 EDITORIAL "Betrayed" called former President Diosdado Macapagal's apology for Edsa II "a betrayal of the highest aspirations of the democracy she helped restore in 1986." I, for one, find that did "not completely wrong."

But Mr. Macapagal did get it right.

Edsa II was not a mistake because it brought to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. (On this point the Inquirer is correct.) Edsa II was a mistake because it downgraded the foundation on which our democracy stands: the rule of law.

Edsa II never beyond being an exercise of democracy; it was an abuse of our liberties, a failure of our commitment to democratic processes. Given that every nation would desire a ruler with the utmost of morals, politicians say most nevertheless maintain a modicum of order, i.e., rule by a government of laws and not of men.

As Cecilia Muñoz Palma, chair of the 1986 Constitutional Commission aptly stated, "The 1987 Constitution differed when the impeachment trial of President Estrada was unceremoniously discontinued and the senate-as-court were brought to the parliament of the streets. The Rule of Law was set aside and the Rule of Force prevailed."

Democracies the world over observed that Edsa II was "an edited landmark against a president who had overwhelmingly been elected by the poor. This time Wright Person was used not to restore democracy but, instead, to supplant it." (The New York Times)

Mother Cory's "Sandiganbayan conviction of Estrada justify the deserting of constitutional processes. Remember that Estrada, unlike GMA today, willingly submitted himself to impeachment proceedings and was willing to step down had his team found guilty. But the process was set aside. As The New York Times observed, "The uprising took place while it became clear that the crowd—his impeachment trial in the Senate—would not produce the result many hoped for: his removal by a constitutional means." The Financial Times even warned of anarchy: "This only confirms the fragility of the political institutions in the Philippines and the likelihood that the country will become a regular location for political action."

Pilipit Cory apologized to Erap, her spokeswoman insisted she was joking while rewarding viewers. So what conflicting emotions in an attempt to rationalize the depth and gravity of the words of the woman's democracy icon. To the chagrin of anti-Erap forces, she would not take her words back. I believe she is because she knows what she was saying and could realistically stand by her statements.

That's what makes Mr. Aquino a true icon of democracy. While in 2001 she joined Edsa II, today she has joined the window, courage and humility to admit that it was a failure of our democratic processes, a mistake.

Mr. Aquino did not "betray the highest aspirations of democracy" with her apology. On the contrary, she is bravely continuing the fight for an ideal democracy for the Philippines: a democracy where constitutional processes are observed at the voice of the people is heard.

—MARGUERITA LACSO,
spokesperson of Bayaw Presidente Joseph Estrada

EST'RADA or Sandiganbayan

Influence spares DAR official the axe

I READ WITH INTEREST THE news story about a Sandiganbayan prosecutor who is facing charges before the Sandiganbayan for refusing to turn over a case folder officially encrypted to him. (Inquirer, 12/13/08)

I find this matter quite intriguing considering that the hidden offense is now in her name for what I might say is a mere trivial matter compared to a grave injustice done to me by a supposedly high and influential government official.

I am referring to the anti-graft and corrupt practices act I filed more than two years ago before the Ombudsman against an assistant secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform. The official enjoyed an absolutely illegal and reactionary decision involving my land in Legaspi City worth millions of pesos.

On Feb. 20, 1999, then Regional Adjudicator Danilo Alday in his judgment ordered, among others, the reinstatement of all the occupants on my land. The defendant occupants failed to appeal on time, so on my motion, Alday issued a writ of execution.

Nevertheless, the DAR official still entertained a lapsed appeal and, worse, granted another decision contrary to the already final and executory decision. That's why I filed the graft case against him. Aside from this criminal act, he sat on the case for three years.

Up to now, I am still suffering enormous physical, financial, emotional and mental distress due to all those seemingly endless delays the shadow partner is causing my land. The acceptance by the DAR official of the anomalous appeal caused my nervous breakdown and a massive stroke last year. It was by the grace of God that I survived to continue fighting for my rights.

I suspect that the close and influence of the DAR official explains why the case I filed against him remains unresolved despite the considerably long period of time that has elapsed. Had he been a small fish like the hapless Sandiganbayan prosecutor, the DAR official would be languishing in jail already.

—MANUEL V. ORANGO,
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San Miguel, Pasig City

Whose interest is BSP protecting?

WHOSE INTEREST IS BEING PROmoted and protected by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas?

Is it the interest of the 88 million or so Filipinos who are depositors of and borrowers from government and private banks? Or is it a handful of millionaires and rich people who are the stockholders of these banks?

These questions have been puzzling my mind since the People Power in 1986.

Consider these: If you deposit your money in the banks they will pay you a minimum of 1 percent per annum and a maximum of 6 percent per annum interest. But if you borrow money from the same bank you will be charged a minimum interest of 21 percent per annum to a maximum interest of 48 percent per annum.

In hindsight, I would say that the Marcos regime was better than the succeeding administrations when it comes to interest payments. During the Marcos regime, we had an effective usury laws which mandated a maximum interest payment of 12 percent per annum.

Under the present administration, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

Officials of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas should wake up!

—PROCOPIO S. BELTRAN JR.,
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What's the value of GMA's word?

"TRUE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, NOT FULL list." (Inquirer, 1/2/09) So goes the newest call of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and her spokespeople. But the call is nothing but meant to distract the attentions of a possible new resistance to GMA through Charter changes—or should I call it constitutional rape?

Anyway, what bothers me to date: Why can't GMA just issue an unequivocal statement to dispel all suspicions and intentions that she really wants a new extension? But on the other hand, GMA has lost her credibility long ago. We just can't trust her word anymore.

Remember how she said sorry for committing the dirty deeds was wrong? And, of course, who could forget her widely applauded vow that she will not run in the 2001 presidential election? While the whole world looks from an economic crisis, Malacañang is struggling with its credibility crisis.

—JESS CALAYCAY,
jesscalaycay@ymail.com

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Water fun sports big hit in Leyte

ONE of the contestants in the 5th National Skimboarding Competition held in Tacloban, Leyte soars into the air.

By Vicente Lubre
Tacloban, Leyte

THOUSANDS thronged to witness the four-day skimboarding competition in this old coastal town of Tacloban, Leyte, considered the "Skimboarding Capital of the Philippines," that was held during the season's long holiday break.

It was again proven during the 5th National Skimboarding Competition, which has drawn about a hundred riders from different parts of the region and the country, that the beach of Tacloban are among the best in the country and even in the world in the kind of water sport.

Samuel Cebedo emerged as champion in the open category, followed by Jared Espada (1st runner-up), Lee Espada (2nd runner-up) and Reuben Abuso (3rd runner-up). Abdul-Basit Macarera had three Tacloban riders.

In the grommet category, Gerald Vergara topped the championship, with Mike Mercado as 1st runner-up, Nick Cañeda as 2nd runner-up, and Carl Gubat as 3rd runner-up. Except for Cañeda, who is from nearby Palo town, the winners in this category were natives of Tacloban town.

The long sandy beach at the Brgy. Dagat-Asin in Barangay Sto. Niño, Tacloban town, was the site of the competition held from Dec. 27 to 30, 2008.

Darwin Badilla, Tacloban tourism-affairs designate, says some children to their teens, as young as six years old, already know skimboarding and that there are many young people in Tacloban who are skimboarding enthusiasts.

Tacloban, which hosts the historic Leyte Gulf, has already produced winners in other national and even in international skimboarding competitions, he proudly adds.

Lee Columba, 20, bagged the championship in the first Malaysian Institutional Skimboarding Competition, held at Batu Feringhi in Penang, Malaysia in 2007. More than 30 other riders from Hongkong, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines were in that competition.

Lee's cousin Darrel also claimed third runner-up in the same international competition in Malaysia.

In 2006, Carl Gubat, a high school student, was champion in the grommet division of the 2nd Penang Malaysia Invitational Skimboarding Competition held only last year. Lee Espada, the previous year's champion in the open category, only placed first runner-up in the same category in that international competition.

Skimboarding is a popular recreation sport in the United States, Canada, Australia, Spain and many other places, but not as popular here in the Philippines compared to surfing. A discipline of surfing, skimboarding involves riding a board on shallow water.

Unlike in surfing where big waves breaking far from the shore are a must, skimboarding makes use of short breaks waves near the shore. The rider usually runs fast, drop and execute his board before reaching the break point of the wave, and then glide to the shore.

Skimboarding has become popular among young people in the region today, particularly those from the towns of Tanauan, Palo, Tolosa and Dulag and the cities of Tacloban, Manila, and Borongan, among others.

The municipal government, headed by Tanauan Mayor Boque Tia, the provincial government led by Leyte Gov. Jericho Petilla and the Tanauan Basket Jaycees were the main sponsors of the 5th National Skimboarding Competition, Petilla says.

Nightly activities were also held to coincide with the skimboarding competition, among them the Miss Open and the Beggar Party, which was held on the awarding night on Dec. 30, he adds.

Petilla says Mayor Tia is very supportive of skimboarding, which does not only help develop the skills on water sports of the local youth but also boosts the town's tourism industry.

Petilla says the newest socially accompanies the local Alem paet organizing an skimboarding competitions abroad.

But he points out that there's more to Tanauan than the skimboarding event.

He says Tanauan also boasts of its rich heritage, such as the town's old church and the food, songs, literature and livelihood of its people. The old town is also proud of its thriving weaving industry which includes pottery, bamboo craft, bag-making and ramon-a-hand ecosystem.

Tanauan, which was chosen as among the national winners of the "2008 Most Business Friendly LGU Awards" for Municipality Level 1 Category, also hosts the places in the province of alag-oil drink company and of an edible oil manufacturers, Petilla says.

Tanauan is just 10 km away from Tacloban City, the region's premier city.

Inquirer reading sessions inspire NGO helping kids

By Carla P Gomez
Inquirer Visayas

BACOLOD CITY—INSPIRED by children's response to Philippine Daily Inquirer's Read Along session in Talisay City, Negros Occidental, less than a month ago, volunteers of Sunrows Camp Foundation, a Negros-based NGO for children with cancer and serious illnesses, mounted their own Read Along, to start off their Christmas Party for children in Bacolod City on Dec. 13.

SOME of those children with cancer, children listen to a story being read to them.

Dr. Alvin Parrocha, the foundation's vice president, read Pantaleon Bulosan's "Inspired" by Dr. Luis Gatmaitan, a story about a homesick patient who exhibits strength by running of her wide array of wigs. Parrocha also read Ang Maglok Silya ni Tatay by Nenard Abellana about a boy and how fate who gave us a magical journey using his wheelchair.

The storytellers and the stories, appropriate for the audience of children who have various forms of cancer, the most common of which is leukemia, and two children who have lost a limb each also to cancer, kept the children both spellbound and introspective.

Sunrows Camp Foundation non-Philippine Daily Inquirer's gesture for the Read Along Session launch on Nov. 22 in Talisay City, Negros Occidental.

The Foundation brings together children from 9-18 years old who are either ill with cancer or in remission, children with serious illnesses, and children who have a parent diagnosed with cancer.

The foundation's primary goal is to provide the children with holistic support that can help them live a childhood that has often, because of their physical sufferings and their families' inability to provide them with appropriate financial support, been lost.

"The Sunrows kids logged for another Read Along session after their experience with storyteller Desper Gallegar and Rich Pardalejano, and we requested beyond representatives who came so that asked for a possible training program for our volunteers," Sunrows Camp Foundation president Billie Ellaybe said.

"We learn, however, that the training could not come to date for the Christmas Party, thus our volunteers tried to do their best using the resources needed."

Sunrows Camp Foundation intends to incorporate some of their sessions in the future with a Read Along since they have found to be an excellent vehicle to deliver messages of faith, hope and love, she said.

They also hope to have an inspiration-initiated training program in their province soon so that more readers can use this vehicle to bring joy to more sick children.

Among those who expressed their intention to attend the training program and become a volunteer reader in the Sunrows kids after reading about the Read Along was Dr. Cecilia Nava, a Bacolod-based Fabares awardee, herself a cancer survivor. Nava promised to become more volunteers who have had brushes with cancer, to spread the love of reading to children with illness.

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Gov't vows no food crisis in 2009

Capiz towns welcome '09 with floods, landslides

ROXAS CITY—HEAVY RAINS, floods and landslides hastened several towns in Capiz as the province welcomed the year 2009 on Thursday.

Capiz Gov. Victor Tanco Sr. convened on Tuesday the Provincial Disaster and Coordinating Council (PDCC) following landslides and flood that swept through several towns in the province.

Residents in the flooded towns stayed in their homes although the Coastwatch municipal government prepared school buildings in case there was a need to evacuate them. Coastwatch Mayor Roger Flores said.

Roxas also told Capiz provincial administrator Zoe Montero Jr. that no one was hurt in the floods.

But he said town officials continued to monitor the situation.

Flores said Roxas also swept through nine barangays of the town—Ibbac, Dayo, Bawod, Agsilo, Naghu, Bon-od, Malinghab, Bilaan Gloya and Bawod.

Arnold Tabaloyon, PDCC action officer, said two villages of Cuartero and one in Dumalag became inaccessible because of landslides Thursday.

Tanco, through provincial engineer Edgar Aguna, sent heavy equipment to barangay Naghu and Bilaan, both in Cuartero, and to Barangay Ibabo Rio in Dumalag, to clear the national road.

The road in Naghu is the shortest way to Mimaropa town in the first district of Capiz.

Senior Supt. Josephus Argan, Capiz police director, said aside from Cuartero, floods also are as deep as 1.5 feet also hit the towns of Sigma, Jamindan, Ugong and Dao, all in the second district.

Aguno said rice crops from these areas were about to be harvested.

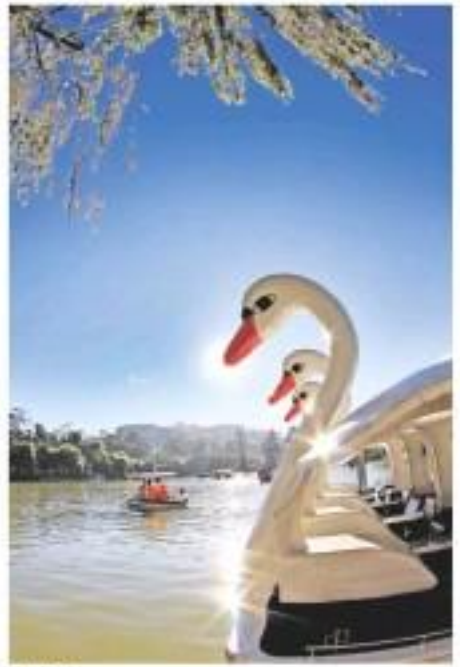
The Mt. 4 Bridge in Barangay Santo Nino, Dumalag town became impassable since Thursday afternoon due to waist-deep water, he added.

In Barangay Agsilo, 90 families who fled flooding in their village had returned home for the New Year.

Tony Gilana, public information officer of Bukas town, said the evacuees returned to their homes late Tuesday afternoon.

Heavy rains on Sunday brought floods to the villages of Matanga sapa, Aquino and Obrero, forcing the evacuation of 69 families to the Bukas South General School.

Edgar L. Cabras, Inquirer Visayas with a report from **Rue Sarmalla, Inquirer Southern Luzon**



SUNSHINE
Burnham Park, one of Baguio City's most famous landmarks, is the most recognized tourist haunt outside Manila's Luneta Park, and for good reason. It was designed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, the man behind new City Beautiful Movement of Baguio when the summer capital was first designed.

GMA says 1M MT of rice to come from RP farmers

BAGUIO CITY—THE COUNTRY WILL NOT experience a food crisis in 2009 as the government is bent on buying 1 million metric tons of rice from local farmers.

President Macapagal-Arroyo gave this assurance during a press briefing at the Presidential Mansion on Wednesday.

Ms. Arroyo said the government has prepared enough measures to ensure the country's food security. She said the projected local rice purchase in 2009 would mark a dramatic increase from the 30,000 metric tons in 2008.

Despite the global rice crisis last year, Ms. Arroyo said the country never ran out of rice although she admitted that prices had to increase.

"How did we prevent the crisis? We were the world shortage, we bought rice from Israel farmers and exported rice before its price reached its peak. We were able to secure the prices," she said.

She said the government's efforts to free distributors adhere and synchronize its price boundaries helped prevent rice retailers.

Ms. Arroyo also urged oil companies to keep the prices of gasoline and liquefied petroleum gas low to prevent prices of agricultural products from increasing.

"We want to protect our people from economic and oil shock," she said. "Food security is important. We have to ensure that there is rice production and we want our rice to be affordable to the poorest of the poor."

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap earlier said the government may request rice in 2009 and may sign an agreement with Vietnam this month.

He was quoted last month as saying the government was hoping it to Vietnam to announce the rice purchase deal.

"We give our prices to them. If it up to them to decide on it," Yap was quoted as saying.

But we're reaching to separate last month that the Philippines and Vietnam were negotiating a government-to-government deal for the purchase of 500,000 metric tons of 25 percent broken rice.

The Philippines was reported to be asking Vietnam to allow it to buy rice at only $300 per metric ton, way below the current Thai benchmark price of $525 per metric ton.

Yap said the country keeps in touch with international trading partners, like Thailand and Vietnam for its rice import needs.

But with the current global economic troubles, "it would be better to explore alternative ways of procurement as we do not drive up prices."

In 2008, the Philippines, the world's biggest importer of rice, purchased 2.3 million metric tons of the staple.

The country's tension for huge volumes of the grain in early 2008 were partly blamed for the surge in prices that were as high as over $1,200 per metric ton in December 2007, the price of rice was only around $400/per MT.

In 2009, agriculture officials said the country will import at least 1.5 million metric tons of rice, lower than this year's importation because there was ample domestic supply.

Yap earlier said the country may end up with a national rice stockpile of 90 to 120 days worth of daily consumption, which is pegged at 31,000MT.

The Interagency Committee on Rice and Corn was supposed to meet in December to approve purchase proposals. The group is responsible for deciding on the prices and volume of yearly rice imports. **Desiree Deluna, Inquirer Northern Luzon**

Environment groups hail suspension of Vizcaya mining

BAYOMBONG, NUEVA Vizcaya—Environment groups here welcomed the recent announcement of an Australian mining firm that it was indefinitely putting on hold its $117-million gold-copper project in Barlo town due to financial difficulties.

"This is a much deserved reward for our people who have suffered long enough from the activities of this company but who anchored and fought all the odds and proved once more that we should take control of our land," said Peter Dayupay, president of the Dulpiti Bathalaven Multipurpose Association, a people's organization.

Stephen Orr, chief executive officer of OceanaGold Philippines Inc., said the company is pinning the Didipio gold-copper project under "care and maintenance" following a strategic review of its plans since it stopped operations in June.

This means that the company will not pursue the project until global economic conditions improve, said Darren Clinch, OceanaGold vice president for corporate and investor relations.

"[The announcement] deliberately comes to us as a welcome development. But we all look forward to the time when OceanaGold would totally abandon this project, withdraw its security forces and turn over all its assets to the government," Dayupay said.

He said the company's move should come as another blow for the mining industry as the national government has tagged the Didipio venture as one of its flagship projects to help revive the country's mineral production.

Since 2006, OceanaGold has been trying to start operations at its proposed mine site in Didipio village, about 270 km north of Metro Manila, under a 1994 financial and technical assistance agreement (FTAA) it has acquired from another Australian mine firm, Climax Arimco Mining Corp.

In June, the company stopped its land-clearing activities in the area, with officials citing financial difficulties; it also said it would need an additional $185 million to complete the project.

It has sought mergers with other mine firms and initially planned to resume activities in September but this was stymied by the financial crisis.

"We recognize the inherent risks that the Didipio project and our exploration portfolio in the Philippines represent for shareholders but the uncertainties around current financial markets dictates that we afford this strategic review," Orr said.

Bambo Mayor Romeo Tejada said despite its suspension, the company should still be made to answer for the complaints due it has generated from the people of Didipio and neighboring villages.

"That is welcome news. But what about the problems it has created? What about the roads that they destroyed? And why are they still here?" he asked.

Tejadas has used the company for its supposed failure to obtain the approval of local communities, as required by the Local Government Code. **Melvin Gascon, Inquirer Northern Luzon**

In Baguio, kite greets '09

BAGUIO CITY—INSTEAD OF fireworks, an Isabela-based doctor used kites to welcome the New Year.

Dr. Debbie Pilmore Jr., 58, flew three giant kites with the message "Joy and Peace to Our Mission" at the Baguio Athletic grounds here.

"These kites are symbols of hope. We have encountered a lot of reports saying that life is going to be harder in 2009. But by seeing these colorful kites in the start of the year, we can still see hope in our everyday lives, despite the problems and economic hardships that we are going to face this year," he said.

He said flying kites is a peaceful way of celebrating the New Year.

Pilmore said the rainbow colors in his kites to capture, he said, the spirit of joy and hope.

The giant kites measured 21 feet long and 11 feet wide. Their tails measured 45 feet long.

Pilmore said: saffron cloth and bamboo as his materials for his kites.

HOMETOWN *Snapshots*

He and his four children traveled from Santiago, Isabela, to this city to fly the kites. He brought along his nephew, Manuela, 33, and Baguio-based siblings and friends to make the activity a family affair.

"Kite flying is a good way to foster bonding among family members. Each member of the family is involved in making and flying the kites," Pilmore said.

"We want our children to treasure these memories throughout their life and to others they grow up they could appreciate this kind of bonding and tradition, something that they could pass on to their children."

Pilmore started flying kites when he was four years old.

In 1985, he seriously pursued kite making when working as a pediatrician in Isabela.

He won awards in kite flying festivals and has been designing kites of various shapes, sizes and themes.

At his home, Pilmore has a collection of 50 kites. Six of them are replicas of the Philippine flag, which are flown every May 28 to celebrate National Flag Day. **Jovylyn Gabriel, Inquirer Northern Luzon**

A BAGUIO family tried to engage people in a new way of celebrating the New Year—fly kites that are 21 feet wide, emblazoned with Happy New Year greetings.

SPORTS
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Bolt steals thunder from Phelps for athlete plum

BEIJING, BEIJING—IN A clash of Olympic stars, Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt edged American swimmer Michael Phelps for the international sports media's 2008 athlete of the year title.

Olympic pole vault champion Yelena Isinbayeva got away sportswoman of the year honors.

The only honor to bask the Olympic trend were in Spain's football squad, which was voted team of the year after winning the European Championship.

Bolt and Isinbayeva each received $100,000.

"I have a motto that anything is possible, but this really is such an honor," said Bolt, who became Jamaica's first Olympic 100-meter champion. "Just to be inducted with every great name in the sport is wonderful. I'll try to do it year after year."

In a poll by the International Sports Press Association, journalists from 96 nations gave Bolt 1,073 points to Phelps' 1,507.

Bolt won three gold medals, setting world records in the 100 meters, 200 and 400 relay to become the star of Beijing's Bird's Nest stadium.

In the Silver Lake, Phelps was the outstanding star with a historic-making eight gold medals in the pool for the United States.

In the wake of his thrilling victory over Roger Federer in the Wimbledon final, Spain's Rafael Nadal came third with 644 edging Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo (491) and Francois Omubia Lewis Hamilton (270).

Isinbayeva was undefeated outdoors in 2008, defending her Olympic pole vault title in Beijing with one of her four world records this year.

"I'm very proud. It feels like for the first time," said Isinbayeva, who also took athlete of the year honors in 2004 and 2005.

The Russian pulled 1,733, way ahead of Kenyan 800m Olympic champion Pamela Jelimo (824).

Today's medal No. 1 tennis player Jelena Jankovic was third with 583, ahead of Ethiopian track star Tirunesh Dibaba.

Australia's triple Olympic gold medalist swimmer Stephanie Rice was fifth with 432.

Jamaica's sprint relay team (1,184), Manchester United (980) and the US Olympic basketball team (897) followed in fourth place.

USAIN Bolt, more popular than Olympic history-maker Phelps.
AP/Reuters

So achieves highest RP Elo rating

By Jasmine W. Payo

CHESS SENSATION WESLEY SO OPENED the year on top again in the rating game as the 15-year-old Grandmaster earned the highest ever Elo achieved by a Filipino.

Perpetual up by a series of strong finishes in international tournaments, So's Elo rating zoomed to 2627 from 2613, according to the latest rankings released by the Fide (International chess federation) for January 2009.

That rating surpassed the lord high of 2620 set by GM Mark Paragua in April 2006.

Eugenio Torre, Asia's first GM, remained second among Filipinos with an Elo of 2590.

GM John Paul Gomez improved by 20 points to rise to third with an Elo of 2569, dislodging Paragua (Elo 2557).

The 34-year-old Paragua, the first Filipino to reach the Elo 2600 mark, gained 11 points to improve on his 2526 rating last October.

So, fresh off his gold-medal win-clip in the 1st Asian Club Cup, gobbled up 17 Elo points in the last three months to sustain his phenomenal rise as one of the world's youngest grandmasters.

"I will do my best to give the Philippines more honor," said So, a high school junior in St. Francis of Assisi College System in Boerne.

Last Thursday, So bagged the individual gold medal in Doha, Qatar as the Philippines settled for fourth place in the 1st Asian Club Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

FAQUIAS stands to rise from a bigger bundle this time.

Manny, Hatton to share $58M

Briton insists on London fight venue

By Cedelf P. Tupas

ABOUT $58.2 BILLION WILL BE DIVIDED between Filipino hero Manny Pacquiao and British slugger Ricky Hatton as fight purse for their May 2 bout in Las Vegas, the website of two British newspapers reported yesterday.

The amount includes the reported revenue from pay-per-view buys, according to the Daily Mirror and Daily Express.

It said the purse will be split between the two fighters, although Pacquiao's camp has yet to announce how much he will be receiving for the fight.

This developed as Hatton's camp again reiterated their desire to have the fight held at the historic Wembley Arena in London.

In the recent announcements, however, Top Rank chief Bob Arum said the fight would be held either at the Thomas and Mack Center of the University of Nevada in Las Vegas or the MGM Grand Garden Arena, site of Pacquiao's eighth-round annihilation of hereby's power boy Oscar De La Hoya last month.

But Hatton's team is reportedly burning the lines to bring the fight to England.

Wembley can seat a maximum of 105,000 spectators and is one of the largest stadiums in the world.

Ray Hatton, the British fighter's father and manager, said they are trying to put together a package to show that a fight in Wembley could financially match or surpass a duel in Las Vegas.

"From our viewpoint, the fight is all but done and will go ahead," Hatton told Telegraph Sport. "We're just still negotiating the terms of the location. We want to have the fight over here for the British fans and we've been trying to put together a package to show that we can financially equal, or better, what they can do over there (in Las Vegas)."

This proposal, though, runs contrary against the perspective of fight broadcaster HBO, which is insisting the fight takes place in Las Vegas because of a more lucrative pay-per-view market.

Known as "The Mexican" for his knockout prowess, Hatton, who holds the IBO light-welter belt, will undergo a 12-week camp for his duel with Pacquiao.

Hatton's training camp under Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s ruff mate in Pittsburgh in England, before moving to Florida and Las Vegas a few weeks before the fight.

Meanwhile, former two-division champion Miguel Cotto of Puerto Rico has expressed his desire to fight unbeaten Pacquiao—that is if Top Rank offers him a showdown with the Filipino.

"My promoter has some set plans for me, and if Pacquiao is part of those plans, I'm ready to fight him," Cotto, who defended his light Welterweight title, told El Nuevo Dia, a widely-read newspaper in Puerto Rico.

King of boxing is emperor of street booze?

HONESTLY SPEAKING, HUMOYO OGorma of Iloilo, Manukbuyong, said it was a hopeless bout between a goat and a bull.

The fish vendor with thick brows on a beard, serious face claimed Pacquiao was losing plainly before the fight.

And in the aftermath of Pacquiao's decision to pick on big Oscar De La Hoya.

This was a full month before the Dec. 7 Dream Match at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

* * *

And the name, Humoy shrieked in pur orbit bunch of hard-earned pesos on Pacquiao.

He rebuffed he was playing it blind.

The bet was more out of patriotism than anything else.

Humoy was honestly prepared to lose.

* * *

What do you know?

Shortly after lunch on Dec. 7, Humoy led a band of ornate citizens in conquering the village saloon (cantina) from shadows of local synthesis brandy.

They also feasted on broiled salmon, fish, his specialty, much of which went unsold as neighbors abandoned kitchen chores and waited for results of the Pacquiao-De La Hoya bout.

BARE EYE

Ricardo Patrinidad

* * *

A terrific boulder followed Pacquiao's historic triumph.

The shoulders of the unbeaten caused by the toppling of De La Hoya was felt all over the world.

In a result, Humoy and company, in a scene that was replicated in countless remote village nooks all over the country, decided to drink and be merry until they could no longer feel nor remember.

* * *

Well, it's not on his agenda for the year 2008, but the immovable thrill Pacquiao brought to his country obviously agitated the pure match wins chart.

Toppled from the top of the list to narrow grossries and sari-sari stores around Metro Manila was the once mighty Emperador Brandy.

It's not easy to explain how Gray Matador suddenly zoomed to the top in this category.

* * *

Call it plain coincidence but Gran Matador happens to be a product of Bay Miguel Corp., whose world-famous **San Miguel Beer Pacquiao has** been endorsing for nearly three years now.

Maybe it's no coincidence that the Grays Matador takeover came in 2008, the year Pacquiao established himself as the finest boxer on the planet?

* * *

The rate is now 4-to-1, meaning four Gran Matador against only one Emperador, owners property Nick Ferrer, a veteran store owner in Barangay Mojon, about outside Manukbuyong.

It used to be almost even at the start, Ferrer explains, with Emperador then slightly ahead, starting to lose in gray early last year.

* * *

Yes, there may never be a final, proof survey on the drinking preferences and habits of the working class.

But Bienvenida Villegas from Dagupan, who plans to put up an eatery and mini-grocery in the Fairview area this year, is happily surprised at the big markets in a new favorite.

"Right na lang Jamaican Gran Matador (Alexa Matador simply removed)," she explains smiling.

* * *

It's not Gray Matador all the way.

The local fish now SMC size has established over the rival could also be detected in the increase of empty liquor bottles in the pushcarts of junk buyers all over Metro Manila.

In fact, it used to be silvery Emperador San Miguel that lorded it over in the pushcarts of junk buyers all over Metro Manila, until the legendary duende, also known as Metro Scrapers or Bandeha, was overtaken by reddish Emperador (left).

* * *

Anyway some self-styled experts suggested a mystical reasons behind the toppling of the former leader.

Remember how Bernard Hopkins had bragged that Pacquiao would be taken to school by De La Hoya because of his size before the Dream Match?

What look place instead was the shameful unmasking of the overrated De La Hoya.

So, Do simple drinking folks now go with Pacquiao who, just like the top street favorite, packs assault power and deftness in his punches?

Has the King of Boxing also become the emperor of the booze man?

Honasan pledges help on sports dev't budget

SENATOR GREGORIO HONASAN SAID HE WILL appeal to co-senators his colleagues to prioritize sports in the drafting of the budget for 2009.

The former chair of the Senate committee on sports competitiveness is working to provide sports a fixed percentage from the national budgetary pie to enable the Philippine Sports Commission to fund its programs.

"We must give sports development its due by providing a fixed budgetary priority," said Honasan. "There is too much reliance on generous patrons who are too few." Juan Ponce Enrile

WBL CHAMPS

Members of the Montessori Integrated School squad pose for posterity after winning the High School Developmental Division championship of the recent Milo-sponsored Women's Basketball League at the Xavier School gym. Basketball Philippines' Executive Director for Training Ramon Fernandez (left), who is also the youth commissioner chair of the Samahang Basketbolang Pilipino and organizer of the event, presented the medals to the winners and their coaches, Christian Semeran and Jose Alcayan.

SPORTSWATCH

Checkmate team finals on

KOMPETENSIA MILO CHECKMATE PLAYERS dispute the slots in the finals of the selection tournament for a US$5-round team at 10:00 a.m. today at the Lasalle Zobel Building in Makati City.

The finalists, who advanced from the semifinal stage of their respective age groups last Dec. 27 and 28, will play a single-round robin over two days.

The five selectees will join Mikaela Kwok, 12, and Claudio Cha Jr. and Gerrylle Sabio, both 13, in the Milo team.

120 tilts in SJC derby today

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL JOCKEYS duel today in the Sandown mile-and-a-half Derby featuring more than 120 fights at the San Juan Coliseum.

Sandowns previously featured in the Sandown race schedule will be hosted today, according to hosts Jay-B Asia Pacific, who is based in Kuwait, and Pedal Dog-napacks of Oregon.

Detailed and Dogmatic fans invited a formidable lineup of contenders.

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Editor Abelardo S. Ulandey

NCRPO sacks 74 cops

57 others suspended over various offenses

By Marlon Ramos

IN KEEPING WITH THE REFORMS BEING IMPLEmented within the ranks of the 125,000-strong Philippine National Police, the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) yesterday said 74 erring policemen in Metro Manila were dismissed from the service last year.

At the same time, 57 other police officers were suspended after being charged with various criminal and administrative cases.

Fifteen NCRPO operatives indicted for different offenses were also detained.

Director Leopoldo Bataoil, NCRPO chief, said the meting out of disciplinary measures on erring police personnel was part of their "Oplan Highwhipe" as contained in the PNP's Integrated Transformation Program (ITP).

According to Bataoil, most of the policemen who were either suspended or dismissed from the service were punished for failing to attend court hearings or for abuse of authority.

Some, on the other hand, were sanctioned for being absent (absent without official leave) or for being involved in crime syndicates.

"While we are quick in acknowledging the good deeds of our men, we are also quick to meting out scalawags in police uniform," Bataoil said over the phone.

"This is a strong message to our policemen that they must toe the line of the PNP's ITP" he added.

Developed through a financial grant from the government and the United Nations Development Program, the ITP was a product of a thorough study on how to improve the PNP as the country's top law enforcement agency.

Started in 2003, the 10-year program would focus on improving the police service through human resources development, better equipment and facilities, enhanced police operational procedures and decentralization of administrative and financial services, among others.

According to Bataoil, PNP Director General Jesus Verzosa earlier ordered all police commanders nationwide to strictly implement the ITP, particularly the provisions regarding police discipline.

Meanwhile, Bataoil said all police units in the metropolis have been placed on heightened alert this weekend as part of the security preparations for the return of Metro Manila residents who spent the holidays in the provinces.

MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER! Only footwear, not food and drinks, are on the menu in this store at Tiendesa mall in Quezon City. —ERIC ALCAYDE

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MMDA: New pumping station to ease flooding in Sampaloc

By Allison N. Lopez

PERENNIAL FLOODING SHOULD be less of a problem this year for residents and students in Sampaloc, Manila, with the opening of a new rainwater pumping station before the start of the rainy season.

In a recent statement, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chair Bayani Fernando said the installation of a pumping station on Aleazay Street in Tondo would significantly reduce flooding in the low-lying area where several universities are located.

"With our Aleazay pumping station, we expect to lessen the flooding along España, Dr. Meriadoy and the whole Sampaloc area... It will be fully operational by May, in time for the opening of classes in June," he said.

According to Fernando, the new facility adjacent to the Estero de Binggaje runs the Mist DRS solution to the yearly flooding problem in the area of Sampaloc.

Conceptualized in October 2007, the Aleazay pumping station was built at a cost of P82 million, part of which went to the purchase of a 6,000 hectare private lot on which the facility stands.

The pumping station has three axial-type pumps, each of which has a capacity of 2.8 cubic meters per second—faster than the old ones being operated by the MMDA.

Aside from España Boulevard, the pumping station will also service other main thoroughfares in Manila like Dapitan, Lacson Lane and Dimasalang streets, plus Montoya and Bocobo streets in the University Belt, said flood control management office chief Salvador Melgar.

The Aleazay station will act as a receptacle for floodwaters that pass through the 2.9-km Balumbóng interceptor, a series of culverts that collects floodwater coming from Quezon City.

"It will also control the overflowing of Estero de Binggaje during heavy rains," Melgar said in the same statement.

He added that the interceptor has not been working properly since it could no longer accommodate the volume of floodwaters in the area during the rainy season.

Citing figures from the MMDA Flood Control and Sewerage Office, Fernando said about 7,462 ha of land in Metro Manila become underwater during a heavy downpour in 2003.

The figure, however, went down to 6,786 ha this following year after the MMDA took over flood control from the Department of Public Works and Highways, he added.

Before the agency's implementation of flood control programs, Fernando said a total of 13,108 ha in the metropolis—equivalent to the land area covered by five cities—were flood-prone.

He said that many streets in Metro Manila now remain passable to most types of vehicles even during a heavy downpour.

Aside from physical improvements, Fernando said the agency has been conducting a year-round cleanup of waterways, canals and gutters as part of its flood-control projects.

123-year-old shelter looks forward to the future despite crisis

By Maria Cleopas S. Gomez
Contributor

THE WORLDWIDE ECONOMIC crunch has also affected charitable institutions, with people becoming less forthcoming with their donations.

This is evidenced by just looking at the enrollments of the Asilo de San Vicente de Paul, a 123-year-old shelter for children and adults in crisis.

Five years ago, the enrollment used to be filled with goods, mostly donations from generous individuals and corporations some Christmas time.

"The increase in the prices of basic commodities eventually affects the living conditions of the staff and our wards. And there is nothing much we can do other than coordinate with the donor and request accordingly," Sr. Mary Blanca, asilo's head of administration, told the Inquirer in a recent interview.

Asilo, which means "refuge," is located on 130 Avenue from across the Pope Pius Center in Manila. It currently has 150 young boys and girls in its care. Many of the children are attending a day care center being run by the Daughters of Charity; another 50, who are once long term stay, are enrolled in public schools while 30 others are attending vocational schools. The rest are only temporarily staying in the center while undergoing processing for their transfer to another institution.

The challenges faced by Asilo range from growing expenditures to dwindling donations in the last 10 years. Although it has a convenience staff that does not mind working long hours, some have decided to leave the center for greener pastures.

Lina Lumbog, who is in charge of overseeing the asilo, said they need at least P2 million a month for the center's needs which range from health care, infrastructure, food, salaries and maintenance, among others.

Food runs up the biggest portion of the budget, Lumbog added. There are 350 children (orphans) and staff members who need to be fed three times a day. The nuns re-planned a week in advance with most of the vegetables coming from Divisoria and Asli bought in Navotas. Every day the center conserves at least a can or of rice. Milk being a must for 1/3 of its wards, Asilo also needs three kilos of powdered milk and a sack of sugar a month.

Medicine is also something the center can't go without. The institution is thankful to drugstore of Malta, an international nongovernment organization, which has been shouldering the salary of the center's full-time nurse for the last five years. In return, the NGO also provides free medicine or pills it to the Asilo on a discounted price.

Lumbog said they tried to ask drug companies for help but unfortunately, no one has responded yet to their letter. "Therefore, we keep our own supplies on hand with the resources," she said.

In addition to food, the center also has to pay for its utilities. Its monthly electric bill runs up to P130,000 while it needs between P127,000 and P140,000 for its water usage. Minor repairs of the center's facilities amount to at least P50,000 to P100,000 a month.

To ensure that it has enough money to sustain its operations, the center has come up with income-generating activities, including log saving. It has also started raising its resources also one step to the center for a daily rate of P250 per bed. There are also air-conditioned rooms for P950 a day.

The Asilo stores have also opened the Gregg Enhausen Bakery which offers baked goods and sandwiches while the Ina Paul Food Center sells affordable meals.

The burden of running an institution on a tight budget is definitely not for the faint-hearted, said Manuntoc. The good news, however, is that there are still some "kindhearted individuals and companies that the Asilo can count on, she added.

During the interview, a leading chain of department stores called up the center to say that it would be donating assorted canned goods. A furniture seller specializing in baked products also gives Asilo 20 cakes and several sacks of odds' trimmings twice a week.

The clan of Jaeseion Montes, who donated a piece of land to the center, gives Asilo the rent money they earn from several apartments in Binondo. Every quarter, the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office also makes a donation of P80,000 while several public schools have awarded scholarships to children residing in the shelter.

Montes said they thank their benefactors by spending their donations in a responsible manner. "We [also] take care of them in our small way, providing them tokens like medals, history projects and growing cards. We consider them part of our family who we can invite to come over during special occasions."

Though Asilo may be affected by the worldwide economic crisis, Manuntoc said she believes that this is just a stage of purification to keep the center dynamic.

"What we heard is a kind of leadership that can withstand the testing times, speak and live the Truth, and be able to celebrate the charisms of service. We cope with the Vincentian spirituality of serving the poor," she said.

CHILDREN in the shelter play in the garden. About 150 boys and girls are in Asilo's care.

THE CENTER has started offering baked goodies and affordable meals to earn extra money in these hard times.

THE BELL in San Vicente de Paul on 130 Avenue, Manila. 123 years and counting.

Mike Arroyo should give lie to ugly rumor

ON TARGET
Klemen Pablo

THE SIGHT OF A 12-YEAR-OLD boy in the front page photo yesterday of a major daily, a victim of a firecracker explosion, would have elicited sympathy from readers, but why didn't he?

Because it served him right.

But it would have been better if the firecracker exploded in the hands of the boy's parents.

The Department of Health and media reminded the public weeks before the New Year's Eve revelry about the dangers of exploding firecrackers.

* * *

Another firecracker victim, 19-year-old Ronefe dela Pena, was caught on camera twitching in pain while being treated at the East Avenue Medical Center.

Dela Pena's thumb was nearly detached.

Like that 12-year-old and Dela Pena, some people learn the hard way.

* * *

What's the name that one of the "Kidung Boys," Joseph Ramiro Tronco, 23, is a relative of the husband of a Malacañang official?

Tik, tok, tok!

No wonder, somebody at the Office of the Executive Secretary was expectedly pressuring an official at the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) to desist from pursuing the case.

* * *

PDEA chief Hermogenes Santiago said his men deserve kudos for not succumbing to pressure and the value of money in the much-public cited drug bust.

The Boy time I met Maj. Ferdinand Marcelino, PDEA's chief of the Special Enforcement Service, he struck me as a no-nonsense, incorruptible guy.

Marcelino, who is said to have turned down a P50-million bribe offer, is on loan to the PDEA from the Philippine Marines.

If Marcelino were a member of the Philippine National Police, one wonders if he would have resisted the temptation.

* * *

If the rumor about Tronco's relationship to a Malacañang VIP and the offer to the PDEA are true, this administration has completely gone to the pits.

The NBN-ZTE scandal, the P728-million fertilizer scam, the distribution of bribe money to congressmen and governors in broadcasting.

And now, the drug scandal.

No other administration can beat President Gloria's record.

And what's worse is that this administration seems not to be affected by all the bad deeds.

* * *

The saving grace of the Arroyo administration are the PDEA and the Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group (PASG).

GMA chose her watchdog over and not smuggling over tariff.

PASG chief Antonio Villar didn't succumb either to pressures from a relative of Mr. Arroyo to go easy on rascalings allegedly behind rampant smuggling at the ports.

* * *

The most ugly rumor about the First Family in the past few past was about the emergency landing of a US-bound Pal. plane at an airport in Japan to off-load Mike Arroyo who was supposedly very sick.

The rumor had it that Mr. Arroyo was just feigning sickness, but was however told that he was going to be arrested in the US for money laundering.

The rumor is very unfair to the Arroyos, especially to Mike, as he was really very ill at that time.

This writer doesn't believe the rumor, by the way.

However, to give the lie to that rumor, I suggest that Mike Arroyo go to the US.

METROBRIEFS

Burglars take P1-M watches, cameras from mall

CUBETTRE between New Year's Eve and Jan. 2, robbers broke into the apartment store of SM North Edsa in Quezon City and stole more than P1 million worth of jewelry and digital cameras, Supt. Modesto Malimong, head of the Quezon City Police District's Criminal and Investigation Detection Unit, said they were looking into the possibility of an inside job. "We are now investigating several people, including the mall's security personnel," Malimong said. According to him, the theft probably took place between Dec. 31, after the store closed for the day, and around 2 a.m. on Jan. 2. PO3 Rogelio Bautista, officer on case, said the mall was closed on New Year's Day. He added that the burglary was discovered only at 9 a.m. yesterday when the store opened for business. Employees said someone broke the glass cases containing watches and digital cameras. Missing were 102 Lacoste watches, 34 Timex watches and 12 digital cameras. Nancy C. Carvajal

Cops looking for 2 men who shot electrician

THE MANILA Police District (MPD) has launched a hunt for two men who shot dead a 39-year-old man on Jan. 1. MPD homicide investigators were looking for Lorenzo Olmedo Jr., 38, production man and resident of Pacheco Street, Tondo, and his accomplice identified only as "Bading." The two were seen intercepting after they reportedly killed Eduardo Abac, of 1190 Kasanglayan St., Mandaluyong, Tondo. PO3 Florencio del Rosario of the MPD homicide section said the incident happened at around 4:45 p.m. That day of the center of Pedro Gil and Arnaldo Streets in Tondo. Del Rosario said Abac was seen standing at the street corner when Olmedo and his companion approached him and, without provocation, shot him repeatedly. Jeannette I. Andrade

Traffic enforcer nabbed with illegal firearm

A TRAFFIC enforcer in Caloocan City was arrested on Thursday evening for carrying an unlicensed firearm. He was identified as Marlon Cladel, 38, a resident of Subasic, Dagat-dagatan and a member of the city government's Radio Communications of Public Safety and Traffic Management. A report from the Northern Police District said a Metrobank police officer, SPO2 Edwin Bustamante, 42, arrested Cladel for carrying an unlicensed 9 mm firearm at around 10:30 p.m. near his home in Barangay 12, Caloocan City. Beverly T. Rabanico

Survivors recall screams, horror of Bangkok fire

BANGKOK—SURVIVORS RECalled how revellers shoved and trampled on screaming victims to escape the New Year fire at a packed Bangkok club, as police on Friday ruled out arson suspicions here nearly 60 people died.

Newspapers here carried harrowing accounts of the scenes of panic and fear inside the Santika nightclub in the Thai capital's popular Nimmanhaemin district, where more than 200 people were also injured in the blaze early Thursday.

Survivors—some with millions of victims in the back of trucks—scrabbled in the club on prays and to give offerings to the dead, while scores of people recalling fiasco remained in hospital after the tragic night.

Thanawan Sawthong, who lost three friends, told the Bangkok Post newspaper that fire broke out within an hour of revellers singing in the New Year.

He said each guest was given a sparkler to light up during the countdown to 2009, but rubbish-

ly inside engulfed the club and all the lights went out.

"People were in panic after the blackout," he said. "The situation became worse as people screamed 'fire' and tried to escape."

He recalled guests were crying, screaming, pushing and stepping on top of one another as they struggled to move a way through the few doors out of the club, while flames raised down on people's hair and clothes from the ceiling.

Early reports by police suggested the inferno might have been caused by a pyrotechnics display on stage some after the New Year countdown, but officials said Friday more still investigating.

"The deputy national police chief chaired a meeting today (Friday) and laid out guidelines for police to investigate how the fire broke out," Lieutenant Col. Pisanti Kongsod said.

"The assumptions are a short circuit or small fireworks that triggered the fire inside the club."

Police Gen. Jongrak Jutanond, deputy national police commissioner, said insurance fraud had been ruled out as a motive but that police had since 2004 refused Santika an operational license because of safety concerns.

The club management had been seeking an injunction from the administrative court, and was allowed to remain open while the case progressed.

Emergency services headquarters secretary Charnia Chamnanbenjasukul said the latest death toll was 58, with 86 of the injured still in hospital.

A Singaporean national was among those killed and 41 foreigners, including citizens from India, France, Japan and Britain, were injured, Chamnan said. Twenty-one foreign nationals remain in hospital.

Many of those trapped died of smoke inhalation, while others were crushed to death in the stampede to get out of the burning club. AFP

Australia unlikely to accept Gitmo detainees

CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA—AUSTRALIA will likely reject a US request to accept detainees freed from the Guantanamo Bay military prison, the acting prime minister said on Friday.

Julia Gillard said US President George W. Bush's administration made the request in early December after President-elect Barack Obama announced he planned to close the prison. Obama has not made such a request, she said.

Australia had rejected a similar request to resettle "a small group of detainees" in early 2008, said Gillard, who is filling in for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd while he is on vacation.

"Australia, as an ally of the United States, is considering this second request," Gillard said in a statement. "Notwithstanding that, it is unlikely Australia would accept those detainees."

Rudd's center-left Labor Party, which came to power in 2007, had criticized the detention camp at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba, as unjust and had demanded the repatriation of two Australians held there.

David Hicks, who was held at Guantanamo for five and a half years without trial, was sent back in 2007 after pleading guilty to supporting terrorism as a Taliban soldier in Afghanistan. He served a nine-month sentence in Australia. Mamdouh Habib, an Egyptian-born immigrant who was arrested in Pakistan in 2001, was returned to Australia in 2005. No charges were ever filed against him.

Habib said on Friday that Australia should not accept the detainees because their histories were unknown.

"It is a big risk to the country to bring (these) people here," he told Network Nine television's news in Sydney.

Obama has pledged to close the prison and Pentagon officials have reported concerns that some detainees might be persecuted if returned to their home countries.

Many European nations—which had long been loath to accept detainees from the prison—have recently indicated a willingness to receive inmates.

Officials from France, Germany, Portugal and Switzerland have all said they are looking into accepting detainees from the 245 prisoners.

Australia's opposition leader, Malcolm Turnbull, said the country should not accept any of the Guantanamo detainees, saying there are many other people already seeking to enter the country.

"It would be difficult to imagine the circumstances in which any claims on humanitarian grounds should take priority over the many applicants for humanitarian entry currently awaiting approval," he added. AP

THE PRESIDENT of Cuba, Raul Castro, speaks during the 50th anniversary celebration of the Cuban Revolution on Jan. 1.

Castro: Cuba revolution will last another 50 yrs

SANTIAGO, CUBA—PRESIDENT Raul Castro predicted Cuba's revolution would survive another half-century as the communist government marked the 50th anniversary of its triumph with subdued celebrations amid fears of economic hardship following three devastating hurricanes.

Thursday's festivities were held under the enduring public absence of the ailing Fidel Castro, who led the band of bearded rebels down from Cuba's eastern mountains to topple dictator Fulgencio Batista's government on Jan. 1, 1959.

"We know that a man alone doesn't make history, but some men are indispensable, as they are have a decisive influence in the course of events, Fidel is one," Raul Castro said of his older brother, who is recuperating in private after undergoing major intestinal surgery almost 2½ years ago.

Raul Castro, speaking beneath the balcony where his older brother declared victory, vowed to "continue to struggle incessantly" and said the revolution would last another "50 years."

The new year begins for Cuba amid hope for the possibilities for increased cash and visitors to the island, and other changes that might ease Cubans' daily hardships. But it also comes amid grim economic assessments after three hurricanes this year caused $10 billion in damages and ruining food prices have caused imports cost to surge.

Many have hope for improved relations with the United States when Barack Obama takes office on Jan. 20 following declarations by the president-elect that he would talk directly with Raul Castro and lift some restrictions on family travel and remittances to the island.

Raul Castro, who succeeded his older brother in February, quoted extensively from Fidel as he spoke on a small, leafy plaza in 1,000 Communist Party faithful.

He cited from his brother's 2005 speech at Havana University, warning "this revolution can disappear itself" and that it's conceived, "it would only be our own fault."

The rebels' victory a half century ago was doubly important: for it has been emulated despite the unfeasibility and vindictive hatred of the powerful neighbor, Castro said, referring to the United States. AP

Aussie researchers claim breakthrough on dengue

SYDNEY—AUSTRALIAN researchers lauded by US billionaire Bill Gates on Friday claimed a breakthrough which could help in the fight against dengue fever by stopping the often deadly disease in its tracks.

Researchers at Queensland University said they have successfully infected the mosquito which spreads the tropical disease with a bacterium which halves its 30-day life span, thereby reducing its ability to transmit dengue to humans.

Scientists hope their work will help halt the spread of the painful and debilitating disease which affects up to 100 million people each year.

"The key is that really only very old mosquitos are the only ones that are able to transmit the disease," said researcher Professor Scott O'Neill.

"What we've done is put this extremely exciting bacteria into the mosquitos that actually halves their adult life span so they don't live long enough to be able to transmit the virus."

The research published on Friday in the journal Science is the result of injecting 10,000 mosquito embryos with a bacterium that occurs naturally in fruit flies but has never been detected in dengue carrying mosquitoes.

O'Neill said the test was designed to see whether the bacterium reduced the life span of the insects without killing them or preventing them from breeding and was able to be passed on to offspring.

He said while the laboratory tests, which involved researchers releasing the bacteria-infected mosquitoes to bite their artificial host—the species needs human blood to breed, had been successful, it would be several years before the technique would be tested in the wild.

"We really is presumptive strategy for preventing dengue fever outbreaks and what we've done is show that it's possible to be done in a laboratory," he said.

There is no known cure or vaccine for dengue fever, which is transmitted by mosquitoes and kills more than 20,000 people each year. /AFP

Hong Kong air pollution worst since records began

HONG KONG—AIR POLLUTION across large swathes of Hong Kong last year reached its highest level since records began, despite government efforts to improve the environment, official figures showed on Friday.

Hong Kong suffers high air pollution, caused partly by huge numbers of factories over the border in southern China, and thermal inversions have also periodically compromise its position as an international finance centre.

The number of hours for which severe level pollution exceeded the danger level in some of the city's busiest districts was by 14 percent in 2008, according to the Environmental Protection Department.

Air pollution levels in the three main shopping and business districts were dangerous for more than 2,000 hours last year—the highest since recordings started in 2000. /AFP

Jet Li named Reader's Digest Asian of the Year

HIDING A DARK SILK CAP THAT slightly concealed his face, Jet Li helped unload boats of purchased milk, clothing, medicine, tents and other emergency supplies from the bank of a trunk. Like many people around him, he was wearing a One Direction adidas Tshirt. Not looking for star treatment, he was just one of the many rescue bringing help to the people of Sichuan.

Li, known for his dazzling kung fu movies that have endeared him to millions of cinema goers around the world, has been singled out by Reader's Digest Asia editors and named Asian of the Year for his humanitarian efforts to help thousands in disaster hit areas and the less fortunate.

The humble movie star with box office hits like "The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor" and "The Forbidden Kingdom" is not doing it for awards or personal glory. Li declined an award ceremony in his honor. Instead plans to donate the $3000 award money toward charitable causes.

"Reader's Digest believes in the fundamental goodness of mankind, we celebrate the heroic people and the greatness residing within each of us—as well as the universally shared experiences that connect us as a caring global community. Li's important work at One Foundation is a manifest of that," says Alex Pinelle, editor in chief of English magazine for Reader's Digest in Asia.

JET LI on the front cover of the January issue of Reader's Digest

The Reader's Digest Asian of the Year is selected by the editors of Reader's Digest magazines in Asia as the person who best embodies the contemporary expression of Asia's values and traditions. Li is in good company. Dr. Sanchit Gal, a Singapore eye doctor, who was recognized by Reader's Digest in 2007 for helping thousands of Asians see. And in 2008, Thai pharmacist Krisana Kitsin was named Asian of the Year for her tireless work in helping victims of Aids and Malaria.

Li all started when Li was caught up in the real-life horror of the Boxing Day Tsunami. Li was in the Maldives for a holiday with his wife Nina, two young daughters and nanny. Li and his family survived the disaster but it served as an important wake-up call.

On Jan. 1, 2003, Li announced he would give 500,000 yuans for the victims of the tsunami and use another 500,000 yuan to start a foundation. In the end, it took more than two years to create One Foundation, partly because Li had already committed to making several movies, but more important, because he needed time to prepare, study and do research.

His work with institutions around the world and spent time at philanthropic organizations, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, to learn what makes a successful non-government organization (NGO).

The WORLD

Julie Lorene B. Cinco

Sri Lanka troops march into Tamil Tigers' HQ

COLOMBO—SRI LANKAN TROOPS FOUGHT their way into the Tamil Tigers' de facto capital of Kilinochchi and the entire town will soon be under government control, an official said on Friday, in what would be a major blow for the rebels.

The Sri Lankan military has had a series of recent battlefield victories against the Tigers and vowed to end their more than 25-year separatist war.

"[The] fall of Kilinochchi soon will be a reality" said defense ministry spokesperson and government minister Keheliya Rambukwella.

Sources from President Mahinda Rajapaksa's office said that troops had entered Kilinochchi from two fronts and that fighting with rebels was going on.

"Troops are inside the town and they are sweeping up things here and there," said a military source who asked not to be identified.

State media said the military had surrounded Kilinochchi and that many rebels had fled.

It is special media briefing (Admiral Hettiarachi, director general of the Media Center for National Security, said "Kilinochchi will be captured within few hours time."

Sri Lankan media rose around five percent on the news and the rupee steadied.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had no immediate comment.

Defense analysts said the fall of Kilinochchi would be a bitter blow for the LTTE.

"This is a major defeat for the LTTE. The fall of Kilinochchi means the LTTE will have their main territory in Wanni," said Iqbal Athas, a defense analyst with Jane's Defence, referring to a rebel stronghold in the northeast.

"I would not say that is the end of the war, but it may be the beginning of the shrinking of major LTTE dominated areas."

Parliamentary Secretary, a political analyst, said Kilinochchi was significant for the LTTE's political and administrative activities.

"The capture indicates very clearly that the LTTE's attempt to build up a quasi-state has come to...

A PAINFUL ordeal Residents mourn prayer in Sri Lanka. AFP/AFP

...hand," he said.

Exactly a year ago, Rajapaksa's government formally scrapped an increasingly tattered six-year truce brokered by Norway, saying the rebels were using it to...

The military developments powered the island nation's stock market (.CSE) higher. The Colombo All-Share index was up 4.9 percent. The market left GDA process but gave an economic and war worries.

"With the news of Kilinochchi fall, sentiment just got a boost," said Deeth Ratnayake, assistant research manager at DFCC Stockbrokers.

Currency dealers said speculation of an imminent military victory seemed the equal odds of the Sri Lankan rupee.

The rupee, which has recently been low on Monday (last) been expected to hit 115.00 per dollar on Friday, dealers said. But later was trading around 113.50/70 level, brokers also showed.

The LTTE started fighting the government in 1983. It says it is fighting for the rights of minority Tamils in the face of discrimination by successive governments led by the Sinhalese majority since Sri Lanka won independence from Britain in 1948.

Government troops on "humanitarian" humanitarian operation, south of the LTTE, self-proclaimed capital and Jaffna peninsula to the north.

The military said the capture of the two key rebel-held areas had paved the way for military to move into Kilinochchi for the first time in more than a decade. Reuters

UN PHOTO taken on Sept. 15, 2008, a Palestinian militant closes off rockets thrown together in small metal shops at a storage facility in Gaza. AP

Rockets again at heart of a Mideast war

CAIRO, EGYPT—MOST OF THE Hamas rockets targeted at Israel's southern territory crobbled together in small metal shops in densely populated Gaza. But a growing number are more sophisticated, ... longer-range weapons, believed made from parts thought to originate in Syria or Iran and smuggled in through tunnels from Egypt.

Despite that new capacity, Hamas' missile arsenal is still much smaller than that of another anti-Israeli militant group, Hezbollah. The Lebanese group, also supported by Syria and Iran, is now known to...

The improved missiles, Katyushas, are better guided, travel farther and cause more damage because they have a warhead of up to 44 pounds, roughly the weight of a concrete slab from one of Israel's Merkava tanks.

Each rockets were at the heart of the month-long war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. Hezbollah fired up to 4,000 rockets at Israeli towns were as Israel's warplanes pounded Israeli cities and its troops took large swaths of southern Lebanon.

Now, it's the turn of the Palestinian militants of Hamas. Israeli's air assault in the Gaza Strip, which began Saturday, will be a major test of the military's ability to stop Hamas rocket fire into southern Israel.

Israel vowed to destroy Hezbollah's rocket capabilities in the 2006 war, but while it inflicted heavy losses on the movement's fighters, it couldn't stop missile firing.

Israeli leaders were sharply criticized at home for failing to crush the Shiite militant group in Lebanon. Failure to stop Hamas's rockets could have the same repercussions and leave Hamas more entrenched in Gaza.

Since its fighters violently seized control of the Gaza Strip 18 months ago, Hamas has shifted away from its hallmark suicide bombings of past years, likely because Israel's closure of the tiny territory's borders and the West Bank separation barrier have made it hard for bombers to sneak into Israel.

Hamas has taken up rockets as its main weapon because they make each walls irrelevant and enable it to cause casualties without sacrificing fighters in ground raids.

Hamas has fired at least 3,300 rockets since seizing Gaza in 2007, killing four Israelis before the six-campaign was launched.

But the impact goes far beyond casualties. Fear of the rockets pervades Israeli border towns, constantly sending residents dashing to bomb shelters, hampering businesses, disrupting schools and causing stress-related disorders, like anxiety and bed-wetting. Experts say indication to Israel's south have lost up to $2 million a day because of disruptions from rockets. AP

As US recession deepens, so does its surplus of milk

FOWLER, CALIF.—THE LONG economic boom, fueled by easy credit that allowed people to spend money they did not have, led to a huge oversupply of cars, houses and shopping malls, as recent months have made clear. Now, add one more item to the list: an oversupply of cows.

And churning down the milk supply is not as easy as closing an automobile assembly line.

As a brutal-tech recession in the global dairy industry turns to bust, Roger Ten Groningen must deal with the consequences. As a marketer that his company runs more, eight to 20 trucks pull up every day to unload milk powder. Bags of the stuff—surplus that nobody will buy, at least not at a price the dairy industry regards as acceptable—are unloaded and stacked into towering rows.

"Ten Groningen's company does not own the surplus milk powder, but nearly owns it for the time-being. He taxpayers of the United States. To date, the government has agreed to buy about $91 million worth of milk powder.

"The thing is, they are going to produce it because they have to milk the cows," Ten Groningen said. "It's like a dike: it keeps coming."

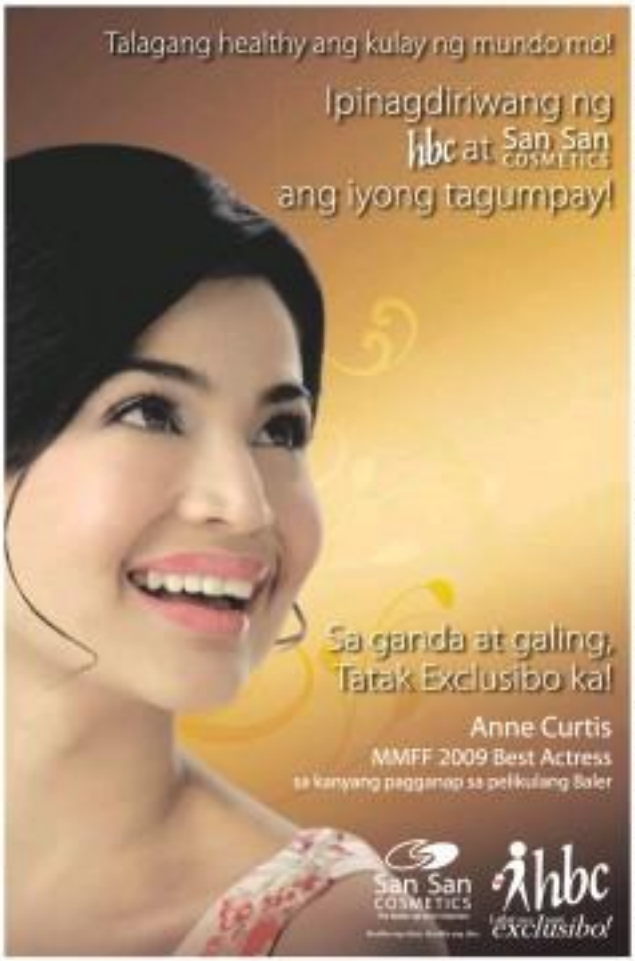
The bags of milk powder represent a startling reversal of fortune for the dairy industry which flourished in part because of a growing appetite for milk, cheese, ice cream and pizza in places like Mexico, Egypt and Indonesia. Many of those countries were benefiting from a global economic boom led by free-spending consumers in the United States.

But now, demand for dairy products is stalling amid a global economic slowdown and credit crisis, even as supplies have increased. The result is a glut of milk that has led to a precipitous drop in prices.

Logic might suggest that dairy farmers would simply sell off some of their dairy cows to a hamburger plant to cut the milk supply and raise prices.

But farmers are reluctant to do that if they expect a demand revenge once rebuilding a herd can take years.

"People don't want to panic," said Brian W. Gould, an agricultural economist at the University of Wisconsin, adding that farmers were receiving $20 for 100 pounds of raw milk just a few months ago. The price is expected to drop to about $14 for 100 pounds of raw milk in coming months. "It is unclear as to whether this will be short term or long term market correction. It all depends on how long it takes the US economy to recover," he said. NYT



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BUSINESS

CURRENCIES
PESO-DOLLAR RATE
P47.21 = $1
as of 5 p.m., Dec. 24, 2008

P114B needed to shield RP from recession

Official eyes realignment of '09 budget, borrowings

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SET ASIDE AS much as P114 billion for fiscal pump-priming this year in order to help cushion the domestic economy from an imminent global recession, according to a Malacañang economic adviser.

In a presentation prepared for the Fund Managers Association of the Philippines, Albay Gov. Joey Sarte Salceda proposed a second round of fiscal stimulus package—a follow-up to the P73 billion released last year—by realigning the 2009 budget and undertaking additional borrowings.

With the escalation of the global crisis, he said, the government should refocus this year's budget in order to spend more:

• On poverty-relieving social programs than growth-inducing infrastructure capital outlay.

• On productivity-enhancing, labor-intensive infrastructure maintenance, rather than expansion of productive capacity or new construction.

• On human capital formation, like health and education, than physical capital formation.

Salceda said this could be achieved by finding the revenue targets of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and Bureau of Customs by P35 billion and P20 billion, respectively, while redirecting the discretionary budget to human capital formation.

Bulk of the P114-billion fiscal intervention envisioned by Salceda will go to the strengthening of the financial sector, particularly through the long-delayed infusion of P60 billion in additional capital to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

Salceda also backed a P30-60 billion fresh equity for the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp.—with an additional P30 billion in contingency fund from the government.

The recapitalization would serve to increase the maximum deposit coverage from the current P250,000 to P1 million, as sought by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Salceda said the budget for the conditional cash transfer, a key social safety net program, could be increased from P5 billion to P25 billion and the funding for scholarship programs, from P1 billion to P15 billion.

"College and technical-vocational training as public goods—decidedly desirable economic activity—and should be centers of public subsidy," Salceda said. "If [people] get jobs, it is schools."

Food production should likewise be a continuing priority requiring an increase in interventions from P37 billion to P98 billion, he said.

Out of the P49-billion increase, P17 billion would be earmarked for palay procurement. The remaining P32 billion would serve to optimize market openings under the recently signed trade deal Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (Jpepa).

An additional P5 billion should be set aside for the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. to make "Philhealth universal," he stressed.

Salceda also proposed the realignment of the following:

• Additional P9 billion for the development of renewable energy, particularly wind, solar and hydropower to attain 61 percent energy efficiency by 2030.

• Additional P5 billion for reforestation to mitigate carbon emissions.

• Additional P6 billion for the national calamity fund.

Scrap automatic debt payments, gov't urged

By Rossel W. Dumlao

EASING UP ON AUTOMATIC PAYMENT of foreign debt to free funds for a large economic stimulus package would be the country's best bailout move to offset the global downturn, according to a group of fair trade advocates.

In a statement, the multi-sectoral Fair Trade Alliance said the government should stop the "senseless" policy of automatically setting aside 'one-fifth of its yearly budget for debt-servicing.

"We should instead adopt the legislations budgeting system, which makes allocation for debt servicing only after adequate allocations have been made for urgent and priority social spending," the FTA said.

The fair trade group added that the hundreds of billions of pesos that would be spared could then be devoted to developing the domestic market, particularly on efforts to create millions of jobs.

"Like other countries, the Philippines needs a large stimulus package," the FTA said. "The government should be able to spend as much as it can on productivity-raising infrastructure, such as school buildings, renewable energy, communal irrigation projects, farm-to-market roads, harvest silos, barangay health clinics, public transport systems and so on."

The group, the convenors of which include scientific outlet Agham and Fairtrade first, Wilfredo Tabada, said that the country should adopt an economic model that is based on:

• A coherent, balanced and pro-Philippines trade-development economic governance structure.

• A program to re-calibrate agro industrial stance to give industry and agriculture breathing space for survival and growth.

• A program to enhance national productive capacity through the all out mobilization of domestic resources in support of industry, agriculture and entrepreneurship.

• A program to unleash the people's productivity capacity through extended activities involving human resource development and completion of asset reforms.

• A program for the incubation of the culture of industrialism, complete with state support, conditions and economic nationalism.

"We also call on our government and policymakers (to) take a pause in the mindless program of pursuing unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral liberalization," the FTA said.

"The present global crisis and the receding going on in many capitals of the world present our country a historic opportunity to overhaul the neo-liberal development program that has miserably failed Philippine society," it added.

The FTA attributes the current global crisis to "the neo-liberal dogma" that markets are self-correcting and needs but for the common good when left unregulated.

"We urge our government and policymakers to immediately put in place much-needed safety nets for our working people, including our industrialists and entrepreneurs," the FTA said.

As to global trade talks that have bogged down many times because rich and poor countries could not agree on how to open up their economies, the Fair Trade Alliance said that there would be no room for a "one-size-fits-all rule" because all countries have diverse situations.

"Each developing country must be given maximum flexibility to deepen its agro-industrial capacity and accelerate growth based on its level of development," it said.

Loan hike to GOCCs offsets state subsidy cuts

By Michelle F. Baras

LOANS (GUARANTEED BY THE GOVernment to state-owned firms reached P19.82 billion in the first 11 months of the year, representing a 230-percent jump from only P5.99 billion in the same period last year.

National Power Corp. continued to top the list of firms that received government loans, getting P11.19 billion during the period.

These loans were on top of the 16 subsidies that the government granted to some government-owned firms that needed financial assistance to avoid disruptions in their operations.

Data from the Department of Finance showed the government lent out P27.65 billion to state-owned firms from January to November last year, but the government likewise collected P7.83 billion in loan payments from these firms, resulting in a lower total outstanding amount of P19.82 billion.

Apart from Napocor, the other major recipients of government loans in the first 11 months of 2008 were the following: National Food Authority (P4.87 billion); NPC-Generation (P3.07 billion); National Irrigation Administration-Generation (P1.75 billion); Light Rail Transit Authority (P1.35 billion); Local Water Utilities Administration (P639 million); Metro Iligan Integration at Airport (P514 million); and the National Electrification Administration (P430 million).

The increase in the amount of loans extended by the government to state-owned firms come with the drop in the amount of subsidies given to them during the same period.

It was reported earlier that subsidies to state firms amounted to P16.94 billion in January to November 2008, down by 21 percent from P18.82 billion in the same period the previous year.

Finance officials said the drop in subsidies to government-owned and -controlled corporations meant they were relying less on state support for their operations.

Still, officials said the financial support eventually given to state-owned firms was intended to make them more capable of enhancing the delivery of their services.

The government had lent money to provide cash subsidies to GOCCs, but it preferred giving more loans because it needed to increase funding for its own social services and developmental programs.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said state-owned firms would be asked to do their share in helping to pump-prime the economy this year given the anticipated global recession.

For instance, government financial institutions, such as Land Bank of the Philippines and Development Bank of the Philippines, would be asked to increase their lending to infrastructure-related projects.

Landbank officials allocate P50 billion for infrastructure lending. DBP would also earmark a significant portion of its loanable funds for infrastructure, although the amount has yet to be identified, the DOF said.

Hydropower project gets ₱260-M loan from DBP

NTC to continue drive for lower call, text rates

By Rina T. Chebuenda

THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS Commission (NTC) will continue its drive for lower call and text rates when offices reopen next week, Commissioner Ruel Canoban said.

He told the business in a phone interview that the NTC had started evaluating the position papers recently submitted by telecommunications companies regarding the regulator's proposal to cut access charges for calls and text messages passing through different networks.

The NTC earlier proposed to cap charges on text message services to not more than P0.15 and P1.50 a minute for cellular calls.

Access charges are fees paid by a carrier for every text message and for every minute of call that passes through the network of another carrier. These are major components of the current rates paid by users for calls and text messages.

The cost of each text message sent includes the charges of the network sending the message and the one receiving the text, as well as the cost of interconnection facilities. The existing access charge for SMS is P0.321 per text. The fee for voice calls between separate cellular networks is P4 per minute.

The NTC believes that trimming access charges will permanently lower text and call prices.

NTC said the proposed access charge for mobile-phone service is at par with Thailand and Malaysia, ranging from P1.36 to P1.70 per minute and P1.10 to P1.30 per minute, respectively.

The NTC did not move to change the access charge for landline calls, now pegged at P0 per minute. The agency explained that since cellular services dominate the market, others such as fixed line services are expected to also lower rates if the cap on access charges for cellular services is imposed.

By Doris C. Dumlao

STATE-OWNED DEVELOPMENT Bank of the Philippines has extended a P259-million financing to a new mini-hydropower plant in Bohol that harnesses energy from Loboc river.

The amount accounted for 79 percent of the P327.2-million project cost of the Inville mini-hydropower plant in Inville, Bohol, which was being operated by the Bohol Electric Cooperative (Boheco) I.

The mini-hydropower plant, which has an installed capacity of 3.68 megawatts, is expected to reduce Boheco II dependence on power supplied by National Power Corp. by at least 23 percent.

"The mini-hydropower plant will also save about 23,327 barrels of diesel, worth about $1.3 million," the bank said.

The project is also a source of carbon credit under the Clean Development Mechanism and is expected to reduce 8,471 tons of carbon dioxide emitted to the atmosphere every year.

"These savings are expected to be passed by the mini-hydro project, which can also augment the power requirements of Loay substation in Tagbilaran City," the bank said.

"Consumers will benefit from the project as it reduces power cost by at least P0.16 per kilowatt hour," it added.

Officials from DBP, the Department of Energy, the Energy Regulatory Commission and the provincial government of Bohol led the recent inauguration of the power plant.

Globe's ₱10-B bond issue gets high rating

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

GLOBE TELECOM INC.'S PROposed P10-billion bond issue has received the highest credit mark of PRS Aaa from Philippine Rating Services Corp., indicating the least amount of risk for buyers of the securities.

Initially, the Ayala-controlled company will issue up to P5 billion in debt in 2009, composed of fixed rate bonds maturing in 2012 and 2014. Another P5 billion debt issue may be subsequently be done in 2010, Philippine said in statements.

Globe—the second-largest telecommunications firm in the country—has a P2.9-billion bond issue due on Feb. 16, 2009, which was also given a rating of PRS Aaa, according to Philippine.

The credit-watcher said the rating was arrived at after considering Globe's healthy earnings and strong cash flow, solid market position, strong shareholders and experienced management team, sound debt profile and ample liquidity as well as the possibility of heightened competitive pressure in the industry and the dangerous effect of the global economic downturn going forward.

A rating of PRS Aaa, the highest mark on Philippine long-term credit rating scale, is assigned to long term debt securities with the smallest degree of default risk. This also means that interest payments are protected by a large or by an exceptionally stable margin, and that the principal amount is secured.

Meralco on last stretch of ₱30-B refund

MANILA ELECTRIC CO. IS ON THE last stretch of its P30-billion refund program, with only P8 billion left to give back to its large commercial and industrial customers.

Meralco vice president Jeremiah Melody said the P8 billion would be given as rebates to the utility's big customers over the next few months, under Phase 4 of the refund process.

The fourth and last phase of the Meralco refund is divided into two tranches – Phase 4a and Phase 4b.

Customers falling under Phase 4a of the scheme include small commercial and industrial customers as well as the streetlights, including government hospitals and metered streetlights with contracted demand lower than 66 kilowatts.

Phase 4b covers the rest of Meralco's commercial and industrial clients.

While the last phase is spread among only 2 percent of Meralco's more than four million customers, it is the most expensive phase involving P16.6 billion, due to the size of the individual accounts.

The Supreme Court in 2003 ordered Meralco to refund customers P59 billion in overcharges related to income taxes from 1994-2003.

The first three phases of the refund process had been completed, but those represented less than half of the total amount.

The P8-billion refund balance was less than half the required amount to be given back to customers under Phase 4.

Also, Meralco has started giving back to customers P2.8 billion in meter deposits, including interest accrued over the past 20 years. –Reginell L. Ho

Farmers, fisherfolk in Movement for Good Governance

By Ernesto M. Ordoñez

ON DEC. 21, THE NOVEMBER HOLline says: "Coalition aims 1,000 years for good governance." The story emphasizes the importance of this project and the organization behind it, the "Movement for Good Governance."

But MGG goes far beyond this.

Background

To understand how this coalition came about, it is instructive to relate the story of one of its precursors, former Finance Undersecretary Mildred Gervera, a Hyatt View member for good governance.

After leaving government service, Gervera continued her commitment to serve the people by heading foreign foundations, a group that works with local government units to improving basic education.

She was also a catalyst in calling the "First Thursday Meetings." In these meetings, former government officials would discuss the nation's problems and what they could do to help.

A year ago, Gervera invited some of the more progressive mayors she worked with in Synergeia and some First Thursday Meeting colleagues to discuss the broader problems of the country. Former National Economic Advisor Jose Almonte was the guest speaker.

The participants concluded that interventions such as infrastructure and governance services were not enough. But when these were provided outside the context of good governance, these interventions were of minimal value and even harmful.

COMMENTARY

The bad news was counteracted by the example of good governance demonstrated in Naga City under the leadership of Barack Magsaysay Awardee Mayor Jesse Robredo. This was followed by many other examples that benefited the people, especially the poor.

It was then decided that there be a specific movement to explicitly cheer "islands of good governance." That was how the MGG.

Goals and principles

The seven-point shorthand three-to-six MGG goals—voter registration and empowerment, election reforms, and leadership development. But MGG goes beyond this, as it advocates the key principles that characterize its work.

In a talk with Gervera on Dec. 26, she identified these principles as transparency, accountability, participative governance, conclusiveness and anti-corruption.

So how do farmers and fisherfolk fit into the MGG?

Firstly, MGG has mostly individuals and NGOs (nongovernment organizations), and not yet enough POs (people's organizations). While NGOs are crucial in giving guidance to POs, it is important that the POs themselves are well represented in the MGG. The PO constituents are the biggest victims of poor governance.

Secondly, the agricultural sector should be better represented, it represents the nation's largest sector. Gervera said there was already a movement effort to include the PO, especially from the agricultural sector, in the MGG.

Farmer and fisherfolk leaders should participate actively in recruiting the targeted 1 million new voters for 2010, many of whom can come from their ranks.

In so doing, they should actively support not only the election, but also the development of leaders from the agriculture sector who will champion the five MGG principles.

Recommended intervention

Not just as the farmer and fisherfolk leaders should note contribute significantly to the attainment of the three MGG goals that seem to be focused on 2010, there is a 2009 need that MGG can help the farmers and fisherfolk with.

For the first time, there is an unprecedented $4-percent increase in the budget of the department of Agriculture, from P54 billion in 2008 to P57 billion in 2009.

The Arroyo Agribusiness leaders' appointed Agriculture Secretary Yap is achieving this and advocating its proper monitoring, through the Agriculture and Fisheries Councils.

But the large DA budget may only mean more corruption, unless the MGG principles for good governance are followed. We recommend that MGG keeps close watch over the DA budget year in 2009.

It can therefore recommend that this year that will put the 2010 candidates on the slate, and those how MGG can help its farmer and fisherfolk partners get the benefits the three under MGGs guiding principles for good governance.

The author is agricultural chair for Synergeia. e-mail: agriwatch@yahoo.com or mailto:DEMOCRAT@

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE
As of December 31, 2008
[illegible]
Currencies
January 2, 2009
[illegible]

SCIENCE/HEALTH

E-mail to jar_yuson_health@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Cesar D. Mangosong

New year's resolution for aspiring centenarians

By Tess R. Salazar

EAT YOUR CITRUS fruits, vegetables, tofu, green tea and soups—simple as that.

Two days before we bade 2008 goodbye, CNN's "Viral Sugar" host Dr. Sanjay Gupta featured the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa, determined by the scientific community as having the highest percentage of centenarians anywhere in the world. He cited the Okinawans' simple eating and daily lifestyle and culture as the root of their remarkable longevity. Gupta described villagers well into their 80s and 90s dancing, working and generally remaining active.

Okinawans' diet, and how much they ate them, was discussed at length in the program. "Volumetrics" coming in how Gupta called it. Nutritionist Barbara Rolls, PhD, said "Head Start." "You'll eat better and live longer if you focus on the energy density of foods." Her volumetrics eating plan explains how low-density foods like fruits and vegetables, as well as soups and stews, "fill you up without overloading you with calories."

All this isn't breaking news, however, as Dr. Dean Ornish wrote in his book "Program for Reversing Heart Disease" that studies by Dr. Roy Walford at University of California-Los Angeles, Dr. Edward Masoro at the University of Texas and others are finding that animals that consume fewer calories can extend their life span by 50 percent or more. Ornish further wrote that a diet lower in calories greatly retards most forms of cancer and forestalls many signs of aging in animals.

Tips to healthy aging

In Inquirer's previous interviews with Okinawan-based health experts, further tips to healthy aging included getting enough sleep, taking a stroll in the park, walking the equivalent of 10,000 steps a day, and going outdoors. Okinawans have been known to live on a plant- and fruit-based diet (with the occasional fish and seafood).

Avoid foods with trans fats (now usually found in cookies, crackers, icing, potato chips, stick margarine and entertainers prepared. About 80 percent of trans fat in American diet comes from factory-produced partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. Drink eight glasses of water at proper intervals. Embrace spirituality. Stop smoking.

The book "Medicinal Fruits and Vegetables" by former Health Secretary Jaime Galvez Tan and wife Ma. Rebecca recalled how Japan is more clearly: "Evidence-based medicine has proven that daily intake of fruits and vegetables prevents many chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension and cancer. Their generous consumption contributes to the slowing down of the aging process."

The Okinawan's varied education continued with physical activities like singing and dancing. Some kept Okinawa's elderly not only healthy but happy as well.

In a previous interview with the locavore, Ramesh Sharma, professor of the Department of Biochemistry, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India, says: "History notwithstanding, the way Okinawans do it, could be replicated even if one lived in the city. A person should eat only 60 percent of what he or she is used to eating."

Untapped potential

AT THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union held Dec. 15-19 in San Francisco, thousands of researchers gathered to discuss and present work done underwater, on land, in the skies and in outer space.

Several presentations concerned work that could prove useful in Philippines, and two of them are presented here. A future column will look at the work being done by researchers in the United States in collaboration with groups such as the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology) on volcanic activity in areas such as Mt. Pinatubo, the Mayon Volcano and Taal Lake.

DISCOVER

Hazuki Tamiko Kubon

Ray Cuevas Jr., an environmental studies professor at the University of Mindoro-Hanunoo City, displayed a world map that identified areas with hydrogen gas deposits on land and in the ocean that could serve as alternative energy sources, and the physical characteristics of those areas.

Hydrogen gas deposits

Cuevas said he did this partly to counter the idea that there were no natural sources of hydrogen gas. One such hydrogen gas deposit in Zambales, he pointed out, but how known to geochemists for decades.

One answer Cuevas couldn't provide was an estimate on the possible sizes of the hydrogen deposits marked on the map. He said the major determinants in measuring the hydrogen were likely to be international politics and funding, especially from the ocean's floor, rather than a lack of engineering capability.

If the Philippine hydrogen deposits Cuevas presented could be harnessed, they might provide 40 percent of clean energy. On Dec. 16, President Macapagal-Arroyo signed the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, to reach the goal of 60 percent energy self-sufficiency by 2030. The president noted then that the country had already reached the 57 percent mark by 2007.

Global landslide forecasting

Another study presented at the AGU meeting involved a global landslide forecasting model that could potentially alert groups such as the International Red Cross in parts of the world where landslides are happening or are more likely to happen in the near future so that they can act accordingly.

Dalia Kirschbaum, a graduate student who studies natural hazards at New York's Columbia University, says at the meeting to discuss her work.

The model, Kirschbaum said, is partially based on real-time rainfall measurements and several factors such as soil type, slope and land cover. Compared to the rest of the factors, the rainfall measurements are dynamic, updated every three hours via information collected from satellites.

Earth science data

This information is publicly available on a website of the US space agency Nasa. The agency is also seeking on a Web application known as Giovanni that can provide earth science data collected by a variety of remote sensors to scientists online or anytime.

To test the accuracy of the current model, Kirschbaum compared the model predictions against more than 1,000 landslides recorded around the world, including several that took place in the Philippines, between 2003 and 2008. The results suggest that some of the factors being considered in the model were weighted incorrectly, leading to inaccuracies.

Kirschbaum and her colleagues are also working with Nasa researchers to improve the landslide model, but she couldn't give a projected timeline on when it might be ready for use. Part of the problem, she said, is that she's the only one in her research group working on the project, and she expects to graduate in May.

E-mail the author at tsrsalazar@yahoo.com.

Creative mental imaging for a truly better year

I BET MANG SANDRO BE-recently while canoodling in Boracay, he said he was actually 60 years of age but he looked easily 10 years younger; and he still had the spring in his steps.

He obviously didn't have much of material possessions but he was selling with joy and his eyes for life was quite obvious as he regaled the group of friends who had gathered around him with tales of his small victories in life. You end up buying something he sells.

"I'm healthy physically, mentally and spiritually," he proclaimed and no one can possibly dispute that.

His positive mindset could be the envy of many people and accomplished professionals. And to think that he hardly knows how it feels to be in a high school class. A mouth before elementary graduation, he had to quit school because his parents could not afford the tuition fees he was asked to settle before he could take his finals.

But that was history. Its Mang Sandro, despite his limited resources, he considers himself more than blessed than many people of much greater affluence than he could ever imagine himself to ever have in several lifetimes. He has never begged and will never beg for alms. He plies his trade wherever his feet take him,

MEDICAL FILES

Rafael Castillo, M.D.

and his earnings are enough to provide for his food and shelter. He cannot ask for more.

He's happy with what he has and his happiness and contentment bring him priceless dividends. He has never been sick or ever had a need to see a doctor. He never had a sleepless night, and never had to worry about scrounging for cash, or cobblers of ten his possession.

Positive mindset

Many of us can learn a lesson or two from Mang Sandro. As we start the new year, the most important resolution that we can make is to ourselves, for our families and for our nation is to have a positive mindset, and maintain a positive expectation of things to come.

Remember ago, are aware about the tremendous impact of our mental dispositions on our health, energy, relationships and practically any aspect of our lives. We compared this to the internal or built in GPS or global positioning system which directs our carriers to whatever we predominantly think of.

If we expect a bad year right at the start like this week, chances are, we're going to have a bad year. Instead of focusing on the problems, we can focus on the solutions and expect that things should turn out just as we would ideally want them, and the outcome should follow accordingly.

Talk of self-fulfilling prophesy and this is what it's all about. Our dominant thoughts can make things real. And this is so no matter how outrageously impossible things we fill our minds could be at this moment. Ask Presidente-elect Barack Obama and he would tell you how easy this is. As a young boy he dreamed to become the president of the most powerful nation in the world, people who heard him dream at this considered it an incongruous black boy's fantasy.

In his mind though, it was so crystal clear that he believed he would achieve it without a speck of a doubt. He never focused on how he could achieve it rather than on the great obstacles that blocked his path.

Talk to Manny Pangilinan and he would tell you the same thing about how important a powerfully positive mindset can determine who would win an important boxing match. Talk to many Olympian medalists and you'll be astonished at how they have superpowered their minds on only think of positive creative images of how they would like the outcome of their games or matches should be.

In a way whatever that is happening to the world today is perhaps part of our own doing. There is probably a predominance of negative universal thoughts accompanied by negative emotions such as bitterness, distrust, envy and hatred. The results can only be in a similar plane and that is war, disasters and economic collapse.

Positive thoughts

On a personal level, if we fill our minds with negative thoughts day in and day out, the outcome are likewise negative. We get sickness, failure, broken relationships and frustrated ruin. It's easier said than done but the solution looks pretty simple in turning on the switch the other way.

For a truly happy, prosperous, bountiful and healthful new year, let's make our minds dwell only of positive thoughts that create positive emotions and we would certainly be convinced that all the doomsday sayers about where our country and the world are headed to never just everything things a bit too far.

Ask Mang Sandro.

A healthier kind of salt to spice our dish

By Charles E. Rubio

SALT OR SODIUM CHLORIDE, IS not truly a flavor enhancer used a food preservative, it is also an essential nutrient needed by people daily.

The sodium present in salt is important in maintaining blood volume and blood pressure, in the regulation of water balance, transmission of nerve impulses and other vital functions.

But in our quest for a more flavorful diet and preference for processed foods (that may contain large amounts of sodium), the 5 grams of salt that is the required maximum daily intake per day is always overlooked.

By consuming more than the required daily amount, salt has been identified as one of the major culprits in developing high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, stomach cancer, osteoporosis and kidney disease, among others.

In fact, the Philippine Renal Disease Registry Annual Report 2000 found that 22 percent of the population had hypertension.

For years, health authorities have been clamoring for further reduction of salt in processed foods as well as

having labeling of salt on food products so more people could make changes in their own diet and reduce their salt intake.

Salt alternative

While this is being discussed, there are still those who look for ways to develop a healthier salt alternative.

In the 1970s, Finnish researcher Heikki Karppanen was able to develop a mineral salt product containing a reduced amount of sodium, instead he added potassium and magnesium to provide the salty taste.

Karppanen became involved in the study of salt and its harmful effects after he learned about the high incidence of heart attacks that lead to deaths among families in his hometown.

He later discovered that it was the high sodium and low mineral content in the soil in their area affecting their food chains that brought about these heart problems and deaths.

He proved the way for the development of Pansalt, a salt alternative that cuts sodium chloride intake down to about half (45 percent) while at the same time, promises to provide the best parts of lowering the low sodium salts available to the market today.

Pansalt is composed of 57 percent sodium chloride. Providing the salty taste (since sodium chloride is reduced), Pansalt included 28 percent potassium chloride and 12 percent magnesium sulphate. It also included 2 percent lysine hydrochloride that further enhances the salty taste of the two components while making their taste more.

Since sodium is now a regulated salt additive, Pansalt also contains trace amounts (0.06% percent) of this element, which is based on the official recommendation of the National Food Agency of Finland.

Approved ingredient

With its reduced mineral salt content, Pansalt has been an approved ingredient in organic food products by the Nordic Food Agency of Finland, the European Commission and the Philippines' Bureau of Food and Drugs.

Available in supermarkets and drugstores, Pansalt is the general use in the kitchen. It is also being used in more than a thousand food items (including bread, biscuits, sauces, soups, margarine) in Europe and Japan, and even by major hotel chains in Finland, including Hamburger's.

Just like its nutritional counterparts, Pansalt's distributor here (Accord International Inc.) has included a number of products in its new model (not carry one to sprinkle in his favorite restaurant dish that has been requested to contain no salt.

Editor Cesar D. Mangosing

PROPERTY

2009 FORECAST

Tourism, office sector to push growth in uphill battle, analysts say

By Yuan R. Salazar

Conclusion

WHAT WOULD 2009 be like for the property sector?

First, the challenging scenario: Widespread decreases in economic activities as expected in 2009 for the first time in decades as funds to support business activities across all corners of the global economy dry up, as described by CB Richard Ellis (Philippines). "It's rich to for the Philippines with recollections of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis remaining all too vivid for affected sectors of the economy such as banking, real estate and construction."

Overall demand could slow down due to the belt-tightening of buyers/investors, according to Colliers International. Fabian Jose E. Aguirre, manager for research of Colliers International, enumerated the challenges that include downward pressures on profit margins, and developers still recovering from higher steel prices (among other construction prices). Also, a lot of ongoing developments (particularly in Metro Manila) could fiercely compete for firms.

Full impact

Global Property Guide said that with the full impact of global economic crisis expected to be felt in the Philippines in 2009, sectors that rely heavily on the international market are expected to be the most severely affected. The Philippines' real estate sector is one of them sectors.

GPG senior economist Prince Christian R. Cruz added that investment (personal or permanent overseas Filipinos (dual citizens, immigrants) are in the United States, 11 percent to Canada with some in Australia (6 percent), Europe (6 percent) and Japan (3 percent)—countries currently affected by the global financial meltdown, with ongoing recessions in the States, Europe and Japan.

"These countries are seriously affected by the global financial meltdown, with ongoing recessions in the States, Europe and Japan. The credit crunch has seriously affected the desire for more investments. With the housing market playing a pivotal role in the crisis, housing investments are expected to be shunned," Cruz said.

He added that "the overseas Filipino workers themselves are also experiencing problems. About half the OFWs work in the Middle East, where soaring house rents and food prices are fueling runaway inflation. The recent drop in oil prices is expected to affect the growth of Middle East countries, as well."

Xone a rosier scenario: The real estate industry may have been preparing for this worst with the players expected to become more cautious, creative and strategic in 2009 according to Colliers International.

Rethinking strategies

"Developers are rethinking their strategies and plans. They factored in the crisis abroad already. Come to think of it, the global economic crisis actually has a positive impact on how companies think. They are being more cautious, creative and strategic. Industry players and investors are more smarter, that's why I personally think the industry will come out better than our foreign counterparts," Aguirre said.

Erick Santos, chair of CB Richard Ellis (Philippines), said it's back to the basics for 2009 as the remaining liquid investors flock to credit-linked investment instruments such as direct investments and ownership of real estate. "The way to go is revisiting investment opportunities from bricks and mortar business or companies which have a physical presence that allows face-to-face customer experience."

Aguirre said there might be a market for overseas Filipinos in 2009. The focus would be other regions (less of the United States and more of Asia, however).

Meanwhile, Cruz said OFWs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are also being affected by the economic slowdown. He stressed that "a squeeze on OFW remittances could have a significant impact on mid-priced housing units."

Aguirre said that for the property sector to grow, two demand drivers must hold up: the business process outsourcing office and overseas Filipinos' remittances. Growth may also be seen in other forms of developments such as institutional leisure and retirement projects.

Santos said during a phone interview that the office and tourism sectors would be drivers for growth. Condotel demand could still be seen in areas even outside of Manila such as Cebu, Davao, Clark, Baguio and Cagayan de Oro.

"The notable drivers of growth for Philippine real estate in 2009 would still be tourism (for domestic and foreign travelers), business process outsourcing (voice and nonvoice) and OFWs who continue to align to the demands of the global labor markets," Santos said.

Touch-and-go BPO industry

Global Property Guide said rental demand is expected to remain steady in 2009. The financial crisis can affect the BPO industry both ways, however. The slowdown in consumption and sales in the States and the downsizing of financial institutions will affect several call centers. Some firms have already announced cutbacks to growth targets while putting on hold expansion projects.

"On the other hand, the recession in the States may push the remaining call centers there to move their operations overseas, with the Philippines as one of the top destinations. This can push the Philippine BPO industry to remain expanding amid the global slowdown. As call centers expand, demand for rental seats also increases," Cruz said.

LIVING room shot of a unit in North Bellow Communities' the Manors

QC condo enjoys fast take-up

By Charles Rubio

MELTO DEVELOPMENTS INC., a wholly owned subsidiary of Ilo Isuda Tan's real estate arm Eton Properties, recently announced the strong market response for its project in Quezon City.

Located on Quirino Highway in Novaliches, Light across Malaria, North Bellow Communities was able to completely sold out its first building as well as a number of units in its second building.

"Sitaro Manor was launched last this March and was sold out within two months. Total buyers—comprising 95 percent—are mainly responsible for the first sale, but the share of the OFW market is expected to pick up as we now start offering the project in various conditions abroad," reported J. Antonio Gonzales, Eton's senior AVP and project general manager.

Mid-rise condo

Sitaro Manor, which is scheduled to be turned over in November, is the first of the 14 mid-rise condominium buildings (called the Manors) that will rise at North Bellow Communities' Phase I.

The Manors will occupy an expansive 3.3 hectares within the 13.6-hectare mixed-use development of North Bellow Communities.

Each of the 14 five-story Manors will offer 20 sq.m., two-bedroom units amounting to 91.2 million.

"Each unit comes complete with wall dividers and doors for the bedrooms, with dining and living areas, a kitchen, as well as toilet and bath. As for the bedrooms, we have decided it is best two shower areas, which will be made appointed by the household in the morning when everyone will be rushing for work or school," Gonzales described.

Attract

Aside from start-up families, North Bellow Communities hopes to attract on-the-go young professionals, young heterosexuals couples, newlyweds, out-of-town students and overseas contract workers.

According to Gonzales, North Bellow Communities will also feature a commercial complex on Quirino Highway.

"It's because should also feature a lot of leisure amenities that it is just 15 minutes away from SM North Edsa and TriNoMa. Schools such as UP Diliman, Miriam College, Ateneo de Manila and St. Jerome College are also nearby," he said.

Gonzales added that because the place is very near the main thoroughfares such as Edsa, Tandang Sora and Congressional Road and SCALA (aka Quirino Highway), any place is readily accessible from North Bellow Communities.

THE SAN Lorenzo Place showroom and its three stylish model units are now ready for viewing at the actual project site.

San Lorenzo Place showroom now open

SAN Lorenzo Place gives middle-income families a luxurious lifestyle within the heart of the Makati CBD. This Empire East Elite project features a direct connection to the Magallanes MRT station.

GET AN EARLY FEEL OF HOW IT WOULD be like to live in a stylish suite of the San Lorenzo Place Makati CBD Luxury Residences by visiting the showroom that is now up for public viewing right at the project site across Magallanes Village.

Empire East Land Holdings Inc., an affiliate of leading property developer Megaworld Corp., has unveiled the San Lorenzo Place showroom featuring three model units of this high-rise condominium community.

Transit-oriented lifestyle

"The new San Lorenzo Place showroom gives our clients a preview of the transit-oriented lifestyle right in the heart of the Makati central business district," Empire East President Anthony Charlemagne Yu said.

The four-tower San Lorenzo Place has 35-square-meter single bedroom suites, as well as three-bedroom, 64-sq.m. combined units. All are built to exude comfort, luxurious lifestyle and security.

And if the elegant suites are enough to catch your fancy you will surely get bewitched by the other features that make the San Lorenzo Place a cut above the rest.

Starting were Hizkael's plush villages such as Dasmariñas and Magallanes, San Lorenzo Place is being built to give residents the ease of commuting to enjoy life without even leaving its confines.

It has a 25-meter lap pool, vanishing pool, children's water play area, jacuzzi, pool sunbathing deck, sauna room, children's playground, changing rooms and outdoor shower area, gymnasium and outdoor fitness stations. There is also a daycare center where parents can be rest assured that their kids will be in good care.

Retail haven

Best of all, the four-tower condominium has its own retail haven where all the excitement that comes with shopping is laid out. Spread in a three-level podium, the shops will be interesting with fashion boutiques, a grocery shop and a variety of dining places and cafés.

Welcoming the residents and their guests is a classy residential lobby with high ceiling and sleek marble floor with an elegant seating area enlivened by contemporary paintings.

Parking will never be a problem as it has a two-level podium reserved for residents' covered vehicles and basement parking for guests of the commercial area. The towers have carpool valets tuck and underground drives to for ample water supply and standby power generator for selected common areas. The administration and security personnel have their respective offices.

Tropical resort-like living at Royal Palm Residences

AT ROYAL PALM RESIDENCES, DMCI's latest development in Taguig, there are officially "55 ways" to enjoy Tuscan living in the middle of bustling metropolis. Each of the 55 thoughtfully designed units boasts a spacious floor plan—from studio (1 bedroom) to 3-bedroom penthouse—and is complete with modern fixtures and fittings.

Royal Palm Residences is a 3-tower condominium project with 1,000 units. Each tower has 20 residential floors and 2 basement parking levels. Each unit has a balcony with a view of the lush landscaping and the Manila skyline.

Residents can enjoy the facilities at the Royal Palm Clubhouse, which has a fitness center, a function room, a children's playroom, and a swimming pool with a separate kiddie pool.

Royal Palm Residences is located in the Bonifacio Global City, a 24-hour business district with a wide range of shopping, dining, entertainment, and recreational options. It is also accessible to major thoroughfares, such as EDSA, C-5, and the Skyway.

SITE development plan of the central amenities area

Active play, passive leisure

The whole amenities area will also be appointed with 1,000 sq.m. of active features like swimming pool, pools, water cascades and interactive water play. Numerous landscaped open areas are also added, to ensure that flowering plants can grow in sync with the emerging community. These amenities will also be transformed into the dance studio, sauna, kiddie pool with interactive water play, tot-lot grounds, skating rink and a mini soccer field.

DMCI Homes classified its list of amenities at Royal Palm Residences into two categories: Active Play for the young and mobile, and Passive Leisure for the young at heart. The young and mobile crowd of professionals can expect the facilities to strategically placed around to keep fit, while a new Dance Studio has also been put up for residents who choose to groove and "rock dance" their way to fitness instead.

A basketball court has been constructed at the left side of the property, far from the tri-tri grounds that require serenity for meditation. A fitness gym, meanwhile, is placed within the Grand Clubhouse where health nuts can access workouts taking high-tech exercise machines. Skating rink, jogging/biking path, lap pool and exercise stations offer other amenities for getting in shape while having fun. For the ultimate workout, a mini soccer field is also being put up to provide a more spacious ground for a friendly soccer game.

For the leisure-seekers, the central amenities area offers a business center, conference rooms, open-air function hall, music function hall with bar and kitchen, a recreation room and entertainment room—all of which are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities to cater to different occasions. Since the young ones have lots of spaces to explore the sand pit, children's playground, kiddie pool and interactive water play. Thus, the area features amenities area becomes a one-big playground for kids and tots at heart.

"Royal Palm Estates offers residents a tranquil lifestyle with the convenience of city living," says Sison Sorianos, DMCI Homes' architectural design manager.

Tranquil lifestyle

The Royal Palm Residences is a medium-density development that boasts of residential buildings with first-rate features. Unit buyers can choose from a variety of unit types to suit their needs: the 38.5-sq.m. studio and one-bedroom unit, 49.3-sq.m. two-bedroom unit, 65-sq.m. three-bedroom end unit, 74.3-sq.m. three-bedroom inner unit and 98-sq.m. three-bedroom penthouse unit.

"With all these amenities just outside your doorstep, your house can now be your just as much as your sanctuary where you can achieve holistic wellness," Sorianos adds.

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The 2009 party model: Bring it home!

By Margge Dallaga
Photos by Ige Fernandez

ISN'T THIS FINANCIAL crisis a bummer? It looks like it isn't going to get resolved any time soon, which means 2009 is probably going to mean tightening your belt.

That also means less money for going out. Less money for partying. Less money for having fun. Everyone's going to feel the pinch.

And like a lot of people, I don't like getting pinched.

Thankfully there is no price tag on, say a good sense of humor. And if anything is going to stamp out the blippy blue to the financial crisis, it's the ability we our part not to take it too seriously.

Being able to laugh at yourself and at the hard times is a sure way out of depressing situations (i.e. lack of funds). In fact, the best gimmicks are when you are with people you care about and you are all just laughing and having fun.

So it's time to bring the party to your homes, dirobol is always cheaper in convenience stores and there is hardly any chance of you getting into a fight with a stranger. The music is always nearby, under your control, and the guest list is also totally up to you. You all get to be VIPs!

The other advantages? So many aside, which means you can quit having to keep shopping for a new ensemble every week.

The point is to have fun and just be yourself. No need to impress your closest friends, after all. They wouldn't be your closest friends if they didn't know the real you.

The best part of home-based parties is that you can actually connect with people, which should be the whole point of spending time with your friends. Also, no shunning or each other's ears over the music. Carrying a conversation over the events of "Umbrella" while being blinded by strobe lights just doesn't quite cut it now.

If 2012 really is the end of the world as we know it, then it's high time we spend the last few years really getting to know the people around us, and not just what they look like in their best garments at the beach and fingers to laugh as much as you can.

Of course you can still go out—when you're saved up for it. But it doesn't have to be the hi-all and end-all of every weekend night.

The home-party primer

Pizza luv

If Facebook is any indication, then everyone is a cook these days. Bring a digital camera to your home party and upend the whole night taking amazingly un-candid pictures then it up and pass. Take pictures where everyone is giving a fake smile. Be kinagbas your favorite Wesley they cover. You are only limited by your imagination.

Circle of friends

The only possible disadvantage of home-based parties is not meeting anyone new. So why not make off your friends invite one or two people who are not part of your group? It becomes a networking party where people have to mingle and actually get to meet others usually your barkada. A variation can be a couples party to see who else is your circle of friends is date-able.

Costume or theme parties

It's loads of fun thinking of wild and wacky out-fits to agonize and the picture opportunities are endless as well. You can be pirates, or 1920s flappers, a masquerade ball in the privacy of your own home allows you to be as creative as you want without fear of embarrassment.

Game night

Pictionary. Trivial Pursuit. Scattergories. Upwords. Cranium. Guesstures. They should already make the hours of endless fun.

The iPod mood rehab

Everyone brings an iPod with a preset playlist of 30 minutes of music. Each one gets his or her turn plugging the iPod into the speakers and losing one's musical taste to friends. You get to hear incredible new music you might never have heard of, or generate a few laughs when someone's love for boyband music gets discovered.

Movie marathons

Everybody loves movies, so ask friends to bring a DVD, a bag of chips or popcorn and their favorite drinks. Put the DVDs in a bag or basket and pick out one at random. Or themed movie nights... love stories, chick flick weekend, horror night. Relax and enjoy the movie!

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New GM Prateek Kumar jumps the curve

TRYING EXPONENTIALLY HOT International conditions to spur the momentum as it announces the appointment of Mr. Prateek Kumar, the first general manager of the all-new Dusit Thani Manila.

"After completing the hotel's executive recruitment, we immediately started our search for the ideal candidates. With Prateek's notable experience in luxury hotels in Singapore and most recently, working as General Manager for a newly opened deluxe hotel, we knew he had the right energy and enthusiasm to relaunch the hotel" shares Gerhard Krapp, Regional Vice President of Dusit International and President of Philippine Hoteliers Inc., owning company of Dusit Thani Manila.

Prateek Kumar is a charismatic and vibrant young hotel whose flair for significant and ingenious leaps in thinking, strategic innovation in this global market and overall remarkable expertise in hotel management swiftly brought about his rise to the quintessential ladder of success.

In my 13 years in the hospitality industry, I have always pursued for perfection. Now that I am entrusted with Dusit International's flagship, I point towards giving perfection a new meaning. Dusit Thani Manila will be all about redefining the benchmark of products and service excellence in the hotel industry using the gifts of heaven, thus creating heaven on earth, says Prateek Kumar.

He has a Diploma in Catering and a Bachelor Degree in Hotel Management from the Griffith University in Australia. Prior to the appointment, he was responsible for the successful pre-opening of Ascott Raffles Place, a luxury all-suite hotel set in the heart of Singapore's financial cityscape. He also worked for Raffles Group, Starwood and Peninsula Group.

With the impressible combination of Dusit Thani Manila's extensively overlooked exterior married with the unparalleled hospitality that depicts the rich heritage, warmth and grace of two of the world renowned and most-desired cultures Thai and Filipino, all these

KUMAR

plus the advent of a new generation leader, guests can highly anticipate an all-new Dusit Thani Manila jumping the curve.

super

Sounds interesting

A timeline of how the beats and riffs have changed us

800
Fleeting riff fame. Drumbeggar, comedian-lyricist-the grandparent for the music industry whose tie supports that the Catholic Church gave the first written music notation system—the 4-line staff—over 1,000 years later and next addresses selling artists in Europe there's an endless road ear some reason on tattoo. All stores prosper England.

1597
Jacopo Peri composes the first opera "Dafne." The plot is lost, and Peri's music is attributed largely—but not entirely—to Jacopo Corsi and Apollo Giustinian. Which doesn't lay a responsibility on Apollo! Before the end of the century, opera is a world hit. Some argue it's the precursor to pop/rock/r&b/rap.

1854
Stephen Foster writes the music of the growing industry of brass-produced sheet music and becomes the first musician to pay rent. Many of his songs were sold of southern-style night-club exercises, where broke southbeats would sit around a piano, drinking rye and reading his "coon music." By the early part 100 years later, rock 'n' roll would be birthed under bombs' brass bands.

1928
Louis Armstrong records the song "Struggles," the title of which is utterly fitting for the times. Really. Worsening years of the Post-Industrial Boom and Bust (1920-1929) in popular song, it was also a year when opera—politically, oh, shocking!—was "popularized" by music. Now you might say "pop-ified" by music, then you might say a problem-gotten union of workers.

1966
John Lennon [illegible] when his visions like "Imagine" and "Instant Karma (We All Shine On)." Which may also—pointing here, for sure.

1969
Mick[illegible] Rolling Stones play [illegible] concert at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan, New York City. The band is legendary for [illegible] as security. The Angels end up brutally killing a man, bringing the free-loving spirit of the '60s to a dark close.

2008
Mythpop rules the daytime. Concerts by rare subject to the [illegible] and [illegible] cameras. Miley Cyrus [illegible] a billion-and-[illegible].

2001
Two years after Napster popularized free, not moral piracy, Apple launches the iPod, which rings the death knell for the cassette/disc and the music industry as we know it.

1991
"Nevermind" is the sonic unbound, launching the grunge era. While classic rock owners the world over ignore the cosmic genius of Guitar Hero III, the Nirvana industry thrives.

1982
Golf appointed king of Pop Michael Jackson releases his blockbuster album "Thriller," which goes on to become the bestselling album of all time. Subsequently, prejudiced critics in the mainstream decree that Jackson's audio will go back of the pop idol, who, incidentally, is starving his bedroom walls with pictures of Diana.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, A BIG hate on the future of music would've been a pretty quiet affair. Ten years ago, there would've been some ripples of excitement and lighthearted talk of "multimedia."

Such a discussion in 2009 is a different matter. Those ripples lead to conventions, and the music industry—not just the business but how music is actually consumed—is evolving at such a pace that predictions and even taking stock of the current situation is quite a brainteaser to tackle.

Super tries to canvass what lies ahead.

On technology

iPods probably won't be around, but somethin will. However, whether we will still have sharp-electricity necessary to run them is something I very much doubt. As all rates are, it's hard to see our current technological near-utopia of WiFi/digital/mobile/mobile phone/video being of any long-term benefit in a world suddenly needing to survive in

ravels keenly again.

Ghost-music reads, for example, has been a wonderful luxury for years since if people can run their amazing mixing desks with a wired generator.

On taste

The record industry and music consumers will continue to confuse the deeper and broad and many fiendish buyancy of the shorter guitar and tons of [illegible] Robert/Appled riffs, because it reminds them of a time when things were safe and steady.

The reinvention of the '80s will mirror us actually. When Adobe started releasing those garish outfits from the pedestal and Madonna were her purple kimmick, my allergies started disappearing.

On record labels

Will record labels be dead and gone in a few years? They've been dying a slow, lingering death since vinyl was removed. The idea of a record company and a record—over a CD—will be viewed from the future as pretty much a late-2000s-century event, with the downloading world a strange, almost quaint little interlude. Between when things could be resubset, reformed and [illegible] sets.

Effectively, the hardcore consumers will continue to consume the situation they've always wanted—where pop culture is reduced to brightly-patterned, strongly-flavored, constantly-flowing software that ensures the continued sale of technologically-fancy hardware.

That said, the death of most institutions is predicted in the next decade anyway, it's hard to see Starbucks surviving a big hike in transport costs. Making physical things and shifting them 'round the world must be a failing model.

One lifestyle is fundamentally unsustainable and a correction is coming. In music, we'll always need sensitive fibers, guitars to distract us through the issue of worse out there.

On the next big thing

The next big thing will be fragmentation, post-like-in-the-1990s, really. In that time technology will play a part. Bands will have theme park-type destinations and studio bands will be there, too, like nebulizers. The imaginative evolution of pop culture will translate into a shameless worldwide sale of [illegible] and [illegible].

The musical equivalent of supersonic, a cluster or so more seriously ideal acts dominating our dreams, acts that are the equivalent of small islands. Side lines, like facades, mysterious caves, passing clouds creeping into our dreams little by little—you will go there or tune in on any device for a subscription.

Tours, Leisure & Chow

InterContinental Manila now Green Globe benchmarked

INTERCONTINENTAL MANILA has achieved the prestigious Green Globe Benchmarked Bronze status under the globally recognized Benchmarking Program. This program recognizes the hotel's commitment to operating to the world's highest environmental standards.

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In particular InterContinental Manila has achieved Best Practice results in Committee, Communication, Pesticide Products. These measures will result in efficient practices and non wastage that will keep InterContinental Manila on the path to securing a sustainable future for the environment.

Green Globe is the world-wide benchmarking, certification and performance improvement system assisting international organizations in assessing sustainability. It provides a certification system that measures progress relative to the environmental problems facing the planet including climate change, waste reduction and irreversible resource management.

Starbucks' angels spreads its wings during the holidays

The heart of the holidays lies with charitable one spirit, the joys of giving. Christmas there is a person for by gap in a whole lot of ways, but mostly to think back and be thankful for a blessed year. The yuletide season is the best time to give back in every possible way we can. And this holiday season, Starbucks Coffee celebrates this spirit with three-year unwavering care for the well being of children, the ill and the community. As a symbol of gratitude for their passionate hard work and unwavering compassion, Starbucks this May Angels spreads its wings as they pay homage to the caring hands medical practitioners, take at children's homes, churches and neighborhoods greatly deserving of holiday warmth. The Starbucks Holiday Angels rounds are devoted to visiting doctors, nurses, patients, police stations, nursing homes and learning institutions to sample the Christmas Cheer and say thank you to the community in their own special way.

complimentary Starbucks beverages and food. Holiday Angels is an activity led by Starbucks Coffee direct partners, to pass

Greenhills Élan Hotel Modern is now open

GREENHILLS ÉLAN HOTEL MODERN IS THE first and only Hotel in Greenhills. Aside from its uniqueness as a hotel-residence, the name - meaning Greenhills Élan Hotel Modern holds another prominent - it's centrally perfect location. A walking distance to the renowned Greenhills Shopping Center plus get a stunning view of the Aguinaldo Golf Course and Wack Wack Golf and Country Club.

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* Rate is per person/night on twin sharing w/ free buffet breakfast.

RAFFLES UNVEILS UNIQUE SALES GALLERY

Manila's leading luxury real estate brand Raffles Hotel and Resorts recently unveiled the Raffles Residences Makati Sales Gallery on the 33rd floor of Greenbelt Mall 3, Makati City. Unique, elegant, and sophisticated, the sales gallery is now open for potential residence owners who wants to take a glimpse of the Raffles Residences' 5-star luxury condominium offers. The sales gallery showcases the lavish lifestyle that Raffles is known for through its impressive lighting, designer furniture, and interior design. The gallery also provides a relaxing place for walk-in buyers who want to view pictures and explore the different possibilities reserved for future Raffles Residences Makati owners. For sales and marketing campaign for Phase II residences but concerned and interested viewing interest among potential buyers. To interested viewers can take the opportunity to visit a Raffles Residences please visit the Gallery in Greenbelt Mall 3 or call +632 8887 3333 to Photo: Raf-

Nia Residences Marketing Manager Ms Gelo Villoso and Sales Manager Brent Lamb.

Philippine Hotels Directory

Editor Thelma Sioson San Juan
Subeditor/Editor Pam Pastor

Color me bright and bohemian

Feminine clothes and bold prints for 2009

By Nonna Concepcion
Contributor

FORGET SUBTLETY and neutral tones. Fashion in the coming year will be all about color and bright prints, say some of the local industry's top designers. Here's a sneak peek at the trends to look out for in the coming year:

All-out prints

In-your-face prints will be big in clothes and accessories. Go for bold prints instead of less-key ones.

Feminine clothes

Keep your most demure in your closet. One of the key trends in 2009 is the feminine look.

PASTEL colors

CINCHED waists

FEMININE clothes

BOLD prints

BRIGHT colors

PLAY-SUITS: casual wear

"New year is all about being girly," says Reki de los Santos of the Young Designers Guild. "Pastels will be in."

Sporty chic

Because of increasing fitness and health concerns, sports apparel will be more integrated into fashion. Look out for trends inspired from bike, cross football jerseys and track tops.

Fruity bebe

A less earthy boho will be back for the summer. "Bohemian clothes in bright, fruity colors are hot for the summer," says Shawee Go of Shawing. "Look out for color blocking as well."

Eye-catching accessories

"Statement necklaces and big rings are key," says accessories designer Happy David. Ruby Gan

SPORTS attire integrated into everyday clothing

SIX PIN-UP girls

of fellow queen, saying, "Exotic patterns like python and snakeskin and metallic colors will be very apparent in accessories for 2009."

Playsuits

One-piece bifurcated suits (either short or long) are slowly becoming one of the looms items this year—you'll see them come out as summer draws closer.

The pin-up girl

We saw the trend coming in the last quarter of the year. Wide skirts, red lipstick, cinched waists, high-waisted pants, polka dots and other feminine details will explode in 2009!

Beauty remedies from your kitchen and garden

Save some bucks with these do-it-yourself treats

By Nonna Capili
Photography by Tata Lobrador
Product photography by Migz Castro

OATS

Face

Moisturize your face naturally with mashed avocado. Leave on for 15 minutes, then rinse. Don't forget your neck! Smoothen your skin once a week with a mix of oatmeal, ½ cup honey, and half a cup of water. Microwave oats and water, and let them soak for five minutes then mix in honey. Leave on mask for 15 minutes before rinsing. Or, mix down with a facemask made of 1 tbsp honey, 1 egg yolk, and 1 tsp yogurt, straight from the fridge. Yogurt tightens the pores while the honey and egg yolk moisturize.

MIX a few drops of lemon juice to address oily skin.

Feet

Make a relaxing foot soak of four tea bags, 1/8 cup dried parsley, and four drops of your choice of essential oil. Mix with hot water 10 minutes before soaking your feet and say "ahhhh..." An easy and quick do-it-yourself scrub is 1 cup brown sugar with 2 tbsp of lotion. Scrub well on rots that often ride against shoes. Take heels, balls of feet and toes. Two cups of milk with a cup of honey make for the ultimate moisturizing foot soak. Soak in hot water and dip feet in for 10 minutes before rinsing and drying.

The rest is some easy peasy for an instant spa at home!

CANINE substituted with ¼ cup vinegar

Hair conditioner

Mix 3 tbsp of honey with 1/3 cup olive oil. Heat in microwave, then work in and leave on hair for 30 minutes in a shower cap. Shampoo and rinse afterwards. Squeeze juice from half a lemon and mix with a mug of hot water as a final rinse for hair. This cheers up balding and residue on scalp and hair and cosmetic grease.

Aloe vera is an ingredient of many emollients for a reason—it's been proven to soften hair. Break a branch from the garden and squeeze sap onto your locks. Use like you would a conditioner.

Nails

Scrub your nails with baking soda or whitening toothpaste. Soften cuticles by massaging a teaspoon of olive oil with a teaspoon of vitamin E oil.

Jo! 60

coverings of five magazines

Editor Nestor G. Torre • Assistant Editor Niko P. Ang

SATURDAY Special

NIVERA. Hit and miss

NOW SHOWING

MMFF draws raves, rants

By Nico P. Ang

ARE THE MOVIES of the 2008 Metro Manila Film Festival really better than the previous years'? With all eight entries earning the coveted A and B grades, the Cinema Evaluation Board (CEB) would have you think so. More interestingly, with "Ang Tanging Ina N'yong Lahat" and "Ideal Balok: 20 Years After" winning as Second and Third Best Pictures, respectively, you'd think that local comedy and horror-fantasy flicks have indeed come of age.

Not necessarily.

By resorting to "encouraging" producers to make more movies by giving tax-based incentives even to poorly-made films, aren't we sending the wrong signal to impressionable viewers that an inferior movie is actually a great one? You can't cultivate moviegoers by equating subtle invention or commercial viability with quality—they sometimes go together, but they're far from being synonymous.

Yes, film appreciation can be subjective... but, adding politics and a "compromised" standard to the nomination rule mix, by nature, does the problem. If the current trend continues, it's only right for viewers to insist that the monopoly of MMFF movies during the Christmas season should come to an end, because parsimony shouldn't operate on blind faith... it has to be deserved.

Strong points

That said, here are our other observations: Among "Balot's" strong points are its leads' fine performances and above-par production values. But, it is hobbled by consistently gaffes. (The puppy that never grows old, ever.) and an episodic unreliability.

Parodies, farces and allegories can be used to reflect the socio-political realities of our time, but "Tanging Ina's" (na Momoxville Dion delos Ales) rising to the Philippine presidency and "Ideal Balok's" archaeologist protagonist, Victorio Eugenio (Sir Soren), finding Rajah Humabon and Lapulapu's magical artifacts while Cambodian and Japanese thugs chase him are just inconsistent.

Debra Alas proves that her comic roots go with Regine Domingo it hard to beat—they make some jokes work even when they're not all that funny. It's also great to see the lissome Cristine Reyes and Iwa Moto, as evil, because personage shouldn't operate on blind faith... it has to be deserved.

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Winning portrayal

Ironically, it's also the feisty Marian who earns in the most winning portrayal in "Shake, Rattle and Roll 10." In the roll-licking "Hawak," directed by Michael Tuviera, Rivera plays an euphoric octopus à la Buffy the Vampire Slayer. In fact, the the production can stand without the anthology's first two episodes ("Isdaan's "Emergency" Taped Lov's delite hic revivable "Dan Octave").

Also worth a peek is Joey Reyes' light and breezy "One Night Only" with fine performances from its cast—most notably Alessandra de Rossi, Paolo Contis and James Gamboa. To have all these sexy couples gathered in one record is highly unlikely, but Reyes cleverly strings their stories together with kinetic wit and catchy energy.

Hartnett's Mindanao-set film among much-anticipated movies

LOS ANGELES—JOSH HARTNETT'S "I Come With The Rain" ("In Vein Arm Ik Plein"), shot partially in Mindanao, is among the most anticipated movies of 2009.

Centering on a hitman (Elias Koteas), who has a brief but pivotal role as Shinedown (known to the opening scene of Brad Pitt's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

Other interesting films this year:

Quentin Tarantino, our favorite expert on Filipino grindhouse movies in the '80s and '70s, is directing Brad Pitt for the first time in "Inglourious Basterds" (yes, with an "i"). The John Pitts are living in Berlin, while Brad collaborates with Quentin in playing titles the actor described to us as a "Tennessee redneck" who assembles a group of Jewish-American soldiers to take on the Nazis in France during World War II.

Knowledge

In our recent interview with Brad, he appeared very excited about the movie, which he described as "outrageous" and "the World War II film to end all World War II films." When we told him about Quentin's impressive knowledge of certain Filipino films made in the '60s and '70s, Brad commented that he was just as amazed with the director's knowledge of world cinema.

Brad's enthusiastic comments about working with Quentin bodes well for "Inglourious..." ("Quentin is a delight! He has such love for film and the craft. On the set, it's like we're in his church. It's a loving, loving experience. He's both feminine and very serious. He's very committed to what he's doing. It was interesting to learn that he dropped out of high school and film became his continuing education. His film knowledge is extraordinary. He has

Joel Lamangan's "Inspirador 2" is just ravenous debut. It has the most attractive cast, but it also possesses the silliest premise that side of celluloid Japanese thugs chase him are just inconsistent.

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HARTNETT. His latest movie, "Come With The Rain," was partly shot in the Philippines.

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3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL X
4 ONE NIGHT ONLY
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8 MAGKAIBIGAN
9 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
10 DAYO

ERMITA
1 BALER
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METRO EAST
1 ONE NIGHT ONLY
2 BALER
3 IBIGIL BUKOL
4 MAGKAIBIGAN
5 DAYO
6 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
7 DESPERADAS
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X

NOVALICHES
1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
2 DESPERADAS
3 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
4 DAYO
5 DAYO
6 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
7 DESPERADAS
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X

PIONEER
1 DESPERADAS
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 ONE NIGHT ONLY
4 MAGKAIBIGAN

2008 Metro Manila Film Festival

Catch these festival entries at MOVIEWORLD

- SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL X
- MAGKAIBIGAN
- DESPERADAS 2
- ANG TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
- ONE NIGHT ONLY
- IBIGIL BUKOL
- DAYO
- BALER

STA. ROSA
1 IBIGIL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER

LIPA
1 IBIGIL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER

DASMARINAS
1 IBIGIL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
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IMUS
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2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 DAYO
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
5 IBIGIL BUKOL
6 BALER

ANGELES
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2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 BALER

STARMILLS
1 BALER
2 ONE NIGHT ONLY
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
6 DAYO

BACOLOD
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2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
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6 ONE NIGHT ONLY

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2 IBIGIL BUKOL
3 ONE NIGHT ONLY
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
5 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
6 DESPERADAS

Greet the new year with a smile

By Nestor U. Torre

BOOB TUBE

BooBoos

MOST IMPORTANT TO HER?

Guest: Independence! That's why I did not get married. Being a single parent, single woman among children, so independent.

(—Shake up your mind!)

* * *

Host: What is your group's objective for 2008?

Guest: Be passionate in eliminate corruption and living wan family!

(Yes to the first, no to the second... please.)

* * *

Host: Personally, how will you manage your time?

Guest: I will pay more attention to my family since lack of time to spend with them.

(More lack of time? Ano ka ningas, Argot?)

Ability to dance

Host: What makes a singer stand out from others?

Guest: Of course, the voice—it has to be different. But, also, looks, ability to dance...don't you need put on it.

(Huh?)

* * *

Host: How do you keep food from burning in the oven?

Guest: To make sure, non the stove first (uh-huh)

(Uh...none again?)

* * *

Host: What about pans, what's the best way to wash it?

Guest: First, put a little wet water on it. (Ano-opposed ito—tuvf?)

* * *

Host: Will you introduce our next contestant?

Guest: Of course. Ladies and gentlemen, our next contestants, it's from Cebu! (Huh.)

* * *

Host: What do you have to say after winning your award?

Guest: Nagpapasalamat po ako sa Lahat ng binoto ko kaya ako nanalo! (Ay, maawa ka nga!...)

SHOT IT!

GARFIELD — BY JIM DAVIS

A LINYA — BY ZOL AMERA

PUGAD BABOY — BY PUGAD BABOY JUNIOR

DICK TRACY

LOVE RANDY'S — BY ELIZABETH HOCHOCO

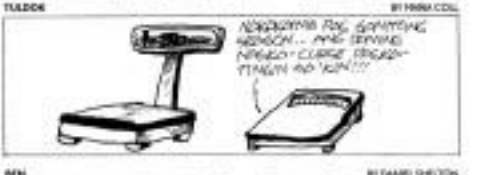
JAMES BOND — BY JOHN McCLUSKY

DIVINE COMEDY — BY STEVEN PAVLOVIC

BABY BLUES — BY JERRY SCOTT

STONEHEAD AND WEEDY — BY LYN GARCELLANO

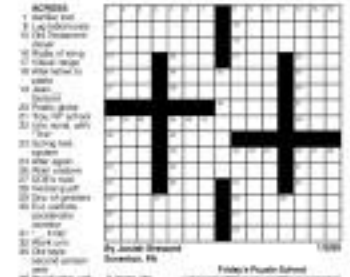
TULDOK — BY NINA COLL



MIKO MACHINE — BY MIKKO ARRERA

BEN — BY DANIEL SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Jacob Stratord
Dunnellon, FL

Friday's Puzzle Solved

ACROSS
1 Hamilton lead
5 Lag behind/overtake
10 Old Testament book
14 Shades of wrong
15 Hideout hangar
16 What bothers to waste
17 Aspen, Denver
18 Fraternal gathering
20 Pizza, half without
22 Cuba rums, with "has"
23 Burning field vegetation
24 Jeffrey Ingram
25 Road employee
27 Cliff-dwelling Indian
28 Hershey's kiss
29 Drive on groomers
30 Ski resort accommodations overseas
31 ___ a doubt
32 Work units
34 Like hearts
36 Medication unit
38 ___ de mer
39 Protective shield
40 Tel Aviv native
42 Silver lined fish
43 Traditional
44 Threaded holding surface
46 Electrical appliances, informally
47 Cornfield measurement
48 Mimic Hockey Hall of Famer
49 Unfamiliar
50 Pyrotechnic
51 Mimic impersonates
52 Roberts adult
53 Actress Mirren
54 Computerize
55 Antelope chaser
56 Chemical ref. ___ number
57 Mimic Hockey Hall of Famer
58 Interpersonal
59 Mimic impersonates
60 Pyrotechnic
61 Mimic impersonates

DOWN
1 Mimic Messina
2 Indian penny
3 Inside: Comb. form
4 Ancient Peruvian
5 Ancient Peruvian
6 Ancient Peruvian
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8 Ancient Peruvian
9 Ancient Peruvian
10 Ancient Peruvian
11 Ancient Peruvian
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HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

	5	9				2	6	
6								8
			4		3			
		4				3		
			1	8	7			
		8				1		
			2		9			
2								7
	7	5				8	9	

Difficulty Level ★★★★

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill this grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Tips and programs at www.sudoku.com

Answers to previous puzzle

1	6	7	8	4	5	3	2	9
3	4	5	2	9	6	7	8	1
8	9	2	3	7	1	4	5	6
5	2	8	7	6	4	9	1	3
4	7	6	1	5	9	8	3	2
9	1	3	8	2	3	6	4	7
2	5	1	6	8	7	3	9	4
6	8	4	9	3	2	1	7	5
7	3	9	4	1	8	5	6	8

Fruits that soothe and heal

MORE FRUITFUL GIFTS FROM DESMOND Tinio's book, "Tropical Fruit":

Mafai apple (mangrove). In Cambodia, the Malay apple is used to treat fever, and its root is used to manage edema and as a diuretic. In Brazil, constipation, diabetes, headache, cough and other pulmonary complaints are treated with various parts of the plant. Teas to their antibiotic content, the fruits, seeds, bark and leaves are said to be effective for ailments of the respiratory system and for high blood pressure.

Tamarind. Rich in vitamin C, the tamarind has many medicinal benefits. It's usefulness is cure fever and as a laxative is known universally in various combinations. Its pulp, leaves and flowers are applied on painful and swollen joints. It's used as a gargle for sore throats. As a drink, it brings relief from sun stroke. Its bark is used as a traditional remedy for boil, ulcer and sores. When burned, its juice is used to treat conjunctivitis. It's also a great cleanser of brass, copper and silver metals.

Greet the new year with a smile

Homepage 00

* * *

Host: Invite them warm to your new abode.

Guest: Oh yes! Diane watch our movie, pinapalabas na sa labas ng sinehan sa buong Pilipinas!

(In la, labas?!)

Effect

Host: What was the effect of your being expelled from school when you were in high school?

Guest: It was so terrible, I became an outcast!

(—Mmmm!)

* * *

Host: Is it hard to be a painter?

Guest: Well, It's somewhat hard. But, I like it, because I it's the less read traveled.

(Figure that out.)

* * *

Host: What has been the best experience you've had during your years as a beauty queen?

Guest: It's how fun I had to meet so many incredibly people!

(Wow, incredibly refuge.)

* * *

Host: What would you like to do next year?

Guest: In addition to local shows, I al- so want to perform in international countries!

(In opposed to—the Republic of Kreditor.)

Lotus Pond

R. Valenciz and S. Bismark

AT THE CINEMAS

GLORIETTA 1	1 MADAGASCAR	2 SNAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 3	3 DESPERADAS 2	4 DAYO			
GLORIETTA 4	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY	2 SEXUAL BURGOL	3 SALOK				
	4 SNAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 4	5 DESPERADAS 2	6 ANG TANGING INA MONG LOLA	7 DAYO			
GREENBELT 1	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY	2 DAYO					
GREENBELT 3	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY	2 SALOK					
	3 SEXUAL BURGOL	4 MADAGASCAR	5 ANG TANGING INA MONG LOLA				
ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 SNAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 4	2 DESPERADAS 2					
	3 ANG TANGING INA MONG LOLA	4 DAYO	5 SALOK				
AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 DESPERADAS 2	2 SNAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 3	3 ONE NIGHT ONLY	4 LONG HELL			
MARKET! MARKET!	1 MADAGASCAR	2 SEXUAL BURGOL					
	3 SALOK	4 ONE NIGHT ONLY	5 ANG TANGING INA MONG LOLA				
TRINOMA	1 MADAGASCAR	2 SEXUAL BURGOL	3 SALOK	4 DAYO			
	5 ANG TANGING INA MONG LOLA	6 DESPERADAS 2	7 SNAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 3				

AT THE MALLS

Ayala Malls

Glorietta

Greenbelt

Alabang Town Center

Ayala Center Cebu

Market! Market!

Ayala Museum

Tri Nomma

Buy 4 tickets of any movie in a single purchase within the promo duration at Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 1 & 3 cinemas, and get a chance to win a new watch, free makeover or a free trip to Boracay. Palawan good for four!

Glorietta Greenbelt

Glorietta Greenbelt Alabang Town Center Ayala Center Cebu Market! Market! Tri Nomma

Hartnett's Mindanao-set film . . .

Front page C1

DOWNEY: From "Iron Man" to "Sherlock Holmes."

incredible memory. He remembers discussions we had that I have no idea about."

Another reason to watch out for "Inglorious..." this year, we got hold of Quentin's script, in which a character mentions "Tagalog" and "Filipino." Here's that exchange between Lt. Aldo (Brad) and Col. Landa (Christoph Waltz):

Col. Landa: Italian? Really? What could you have possibly been thinking?

Lt. Aldo: Well, I speak a little Italian...

Col. Landa: I speak a little Tagalog, but I wouldn't begin to presume I could pass for Filipino.

Let's see if this dialogue makes the film's final cut.

"The Ban," based on the short story "Bolero, Bolina," by Richard Melchor and starring Cameron Diaz, Jason Momoa and Frank Langella, tells the story of a suburban couple (Diaz and Momoa), whose child receives an anonymous gift bearing life-altering consequences. It's a simple wooden box that promises to deliver its owner $1 million with a mere press of a button. However, pressing this button will simultaneously cause the death of a stranger elsewhere in the world. With the couple in possession of the box for just 24 hours, they find themselves caught in a moral dilemma.

Career resurgence

Robert Downey Jr.'s much-deserved career resurgence continues with "Sherlock Holmes," director Guy Ritchie's "reimagining" of the saga of the eponymous sleuth. Downey plays the title role, while Jude Law portrays his partner, Watson.

The brother Chris Hartnett is working on an adaptation of John Carlin's book, "Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation." With Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon in the cast, Clint will call the inspiring true story of how Mandela united South Africa by the rugbies team to help unite their country.

Sam Mendes' "Away We Go" is a comedy that follows the journey of an expectant couple, played by John Krasinski and Maya Rudolph, as they travel the US in search of a place to settle in and raise a family.

In the animated room, "Monsters vs. Aliens," the 52" tall Reese Witherspoon provides the voice of a giant superhero. "It's thrilling for me, because I gain 45 feet in it," she enthused in an interview. "I'm also very proud of this movie, because it's the first animated movie in 3D." (Is the pun-barbed tomorrow.)

E-mail rmrquin@yahoo.com, and read his blog, "The Squint: Reporter," on http://blogs.inquirer.net/rmrquin/ superimport.

MTRCB PG-13 Children under 13 must be accompanied by an adult

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– Joe Anderson, Variety

TAYLOR: Blue-violet orbs.

It's all in the eyes

By Rolen Cervantes

THEY SAY THAT THE eyes are the windows of the soul.

Some of Hollywood's legendary stars are known for their eyes. Elizabeth Taylor's blue-violet orbs helped scenery the emotions of her complex characters in "Raising of the Horse" and "Cleopatra." Ava Gardner's arched eyebrows and green eyes give her a distinct, cat-like look when she portrayed characters like Pancho and Venus.

Style

Audrey Hepburn's unconventional features included thick eyebrows and big eyes that lent style and character to the roles that brought her fame. A lonely princess gone AWOL, a nun and a cookery [illegible] vendor named Pola Lady, Sophia Loren's Spa-like green eyes and distinctive eyebrows are now remembered in her roles as a Spanish peasant and Sicilian smuggler.

You can't talk about eyes and not recall Greta Garbo's expressive eyes and thin, arched eyebrows. With those eyes, she was Catherine the Great, Nicotchka and Camille. Equally memorable were Marlene Dietrich's roles in her movies in the 1930s and late '50s.

Bette Davis and Joan Crawford seemed perfect foils to play royals and vamps with equal ease. While Bette exploited hers to convey the look of a vixen, Crawford used hers to fight back!

E-mail rcervantes_2305@yahoo.com, and read his blog, "The Squint: Reporter," on http://blogs.inquirer.net/rmrquin/ superimport.